

What can I do with the nothing I have? Forms of non-oppositional struggle against capitalist subjectivation.

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I declare that all of the work presented in this thesis is my own

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Abstract

This thesis examines the political potential of production of subjectivity by analysing the work of Giorgio Agamben as influenced by Michel Foucault and the micropolitical theories developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Agamben turns micropolitics into a politics of “bare life”, a politics of “de-subjectivation”, of a dispossession of the human subject – a dispossession understood as the contemporary form of life. To theorize a politics of bare life Agamben makes use of the work of Guy Debord, Georges Bataille and Robert Walser: the thesis re-examines these authors in order to rethink de-subjectivation in relation to a transformative political action. Through this re-examination de-subjectivation affirms itself not as an ontological human condition, but as an artistic and political practice of emancipation.

Debord, Bataille and Walser develop artistic practices where their own bodies, subjectivity, lives, become sites of political transformation. This is an art that takes subjectivity as a material to work with, and an art which is political inasmuch as it struggles *from within*, rather than in opposition to, against the dominant system of capitalism and its control of bodies. The thesis shows how these self-reflective practices have an impact that goes beyond the self, how de-subjectivation is also a process of reconnection of the individual subject with a context, how a micropolitics is always correlated with a politics of instituting and organizing.

The methodology here was developed in response to the material used: this is not just a thesis on de-subjectivation but also, rather practically, an experiment on desubjectivation, where the texts discussed are not just elements to be analyzed but also materials that generate affects, that have an impact on subjectivity. Something like a “subjectivation” of the material used takes place: in the encounter between us and them, new contexts are constructed for Debord, Bataille and Walser, through a contemporary reactivation of the tools they offer. What is to be learned from Debord, Bataille and Walser today, from their ways of organizing micropolitical struggles? How could forms of subjectivation different from the dominant one be created by analysing Debord, Bataille and Walser, but also by exposing ourselves to them?

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NOTE

The “Appendixes” section is comprised of case studies, personal accounts and experiences that together form a corpus of texts differing in tone from the main thesis itself, more personal in nature than the discursive, objective form of the latter. If this overall structure could ostensibly be seen as instantiating a division between theory and practice, in fact the connection between case studies and the trajectory of the argument is always intimate; at each point the latter is in effect shaped by the former. To compensate for this artificial but structurally necessary division I have chosen to mark the distinction between the two orders of the text with the following sign:



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Introduction

De-subjectivation as artistic and political practice

This thesis investigates the political potential of a production of subjectivity by analysing the work of Giorgio Agamben inspired by the microphysics of power developed by Michel Foucault and in comparison to the micropolitics developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Agamben takes up a politics of subjectivation and turns it into a politics of “bare life” as *the* contemporary form of life, as shaped by a condition of “de-subjectivation”.¹ To theorize this politics of bareness Agamben makes use of the work of Guy Debord, Georges Bataille and Robert Walser as authors dealing with the problem of de-subjectivation. The thesis re-examines the political potential of de-subjectivation through a reading of Debord, Bataille and Walser not simply as writers and philosophers but as experimental artists. To this effect their work needs to be disentangled from Agamben’s philosophical apparatus, and reconnected with a micropolitics not as based on dispossession but as involving a creation of consistency.

This introduction presents the theoretical framework the thesis elaborates to discuss de-subjectivation, it maps out other important issues addressed in relation to de-subjectivation, and finally it explains the methodology used and its impact on the structure of the thesis. The main body of the thesis develops the argument around the centrality of de-subjectivation as a political practice, elaborated through Agamben and through close readings of Debord, Bataille and Walser; the appendix gathers examples where de-subjectivation affects different contexts, indirectly related with the material sustaining the central argument.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical starting point of the thesis is provided by Agamben, who in the last decades has taken up and reworked a politics of subjectivation in relation to a persistent

¹ See for instance Agamben, “I am sure you are more pessimistic than I am...” in *Rethinking Marxism*, Volume 16, Issue 2, April 2004: 115-124. I use the terms “de-subjectivation”, “subjectivation”, “de-subjectivized” and “subjectivized” rather than “de-subjectification” and “de-subjectifying” because they are closer to the the French and the Italian of the authors who use them.

question of the contemporary.² Agamben turns micropolitics into a politics of bare life as a universal contemporary condition. His book on Auschwitz can be read as a study of the most extreme condition of de-subjection: the *Muselmann* in the concentration camp is stripped of all human characteristics, and it becomes a paradigmatic form of subjection.³ What gets produced in the camps is “bare life”, and Agamben reads this condition of bareness as a “paradigm” of sovereign power, historically tracing it through his long and yet incomplete series of books titled *Homo Sacer*.⁴ In the introduction to this series Agamben situates his own research as a continuation of the “unfinished” project of Foucault, of a Foucauldian analyses of institutions of subjection.⁵

Foucault analyses the prison, the hospital, the factory, and reveals how these institutions permeate and discipline bodies. He talks of a “microphysics of power” to indicate that power relations are not simply played at the level of subjects, through a dialectic of master and slave, exploiters and exploited: they play *across* ourselves as individual subjects (you don’t necessarily perceive the extent to which you are not only exploited but also exploiting yourself). Foucault analyses institutions often familiar to us, *everyday* institutions. The prison becomes a “paradigmatic” (Agamben) or “diagrammatic” (Deleuze) institution in *Discipline and Punish* also because the book is written alongside a personal experience of militant engagement with the Groupe d’Information sur les Prisons (G.I.P.).⁶ In Agamben the emergence of a paradigm is not related to militant experiences, and instead of analyzing everyday institutions Agamben chooses the concentration camp as the paradigmatic apparatus of sovereign power, reappearing today in different forms in Palestine, Guantanamo, the migrant detention centres across Europe, the Border Agency areas of the airports. Foucault writes the minute and changeable modes in which power permeates our bodies; Agamben studies Foucault’s microphysics of power, but he universalizes and generalizes his analysis. Agamben’s priority is to define a universal condition (bareness) and a philosophical apparatus (potentiality) to generate a “form-of-life”.⁷

² Agamben, “What is the Contemporary?” in *What is an Apparatus*, Stanford University Press, 2009, pp. 39-54.

³ Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, New York, Zone Books, 1999

⁴ Agamben, “What is a Paradigm”, in *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, New York, Zone Books, 2009, pp 9-32.

⁵ Agamben, *Homo Sacer : Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, 1998, pp 9-14

⁶ On the relationship between writing and militant practice see Foucault, *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*, New York, Semiotext(e), 1991

⁷ Agamben, “On Potentiality”, in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, Stanford University Press, 1999, pp 177-184.

With *Homo Sacer* Agamben traces the historical emergence of a condition of bareness we all, according to him, share today. This is how the work of Debord interests Agamben: the spectacle theorized by Debord is capitalism as producing de-subjectivized subjects, a bare life of the same nature of that of the concentration camps.⁸ Bataille does not deal with capitalist alienation or the Holocaust but, before and during the war, he experiments with various de-subjectivizing practices. Agamben criticizes what he regards as an irresponsible enthusiasm for de-subjectivation on the part of Bataille, and this criticism allows Agamben to define by contrast his own understanding of de-subjectivation.⁹ Walser also provides an example of bareness for Agamben, who reads his work as addressing the collapse of a morality based on an opposition between good and bad, considered as another cipher of the contemporary.¹⁰ With the help of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, the thesis operates a disentanglement of Debord, Bataille and Walser from the universalizing philosophical approach of Agamben.

To counter “bare life” Agamben develops a practice of *doubling*, as a repetition of what we have and encounter. This constitutes a non-oppositional approach for a political practice, it pursues an emancipation from sovereign power on the basis of a shared terrain rather than on distinctions and oppositions. “Doubling” is actually a term used by Deleuze to explain Foucault and particularly Foucault’s later work on subjectivation. The analysis of a practice of doubling can be used to further highlight the differences between Foucault and Agamben. There is a section of *The Coming Community* where Agamben explains his politics by referencing a messianic parable: when the end of time comes - and this end for Agamben is already “coming” - everything will change by remaining *almost* the same, almost in the same position, through a “tiny displacement”.¹¹ This displacement produces the imperceptible shift from our condition of bareness to what Agamben calls a “form-of-life”: the tragic condition of contemporary de-subjectivized human beings is also the condition for their redemption, for a politics which is not against but *again* – a politics of repetition.¹² The thesis explores Agamben’s politics of doubling understanding it as a practice of interpreting

⁸ See for instance Agamben *The Coming Community*, University of Minnesota Press, 2007

⁹ Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, Stanford University Press, 2004, pp 5-12.

¹⁰ Also in Agamben *The Coming Community*, *op. cit.*, 2007

¹¹ Agamben, “Haloes”, in *The Coming Community*, *op. cit.*, pp 53-58.

¹² Agamben, “Form-of-Life” in *Means without Ends*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000 pp 3-26.

everything (Debord, Bataille, Walser) through a philosophical device of potentiality that registers but also generates bareness in order to redeem it.

What is at stake in Foucault is also a number two, an opposition that has to be undone and re-negotiated. But for Foucault doubling produces a multiplication, a proliferation: the opposition is deactivated not with a suspension into a balanced polarity, but when the two elements are played together, changing, creating frictions, fragmentations. Deleuze describes subjectivation in the late work of Foucault as a folding, unfolding, refolding of the subject.¹³ In Foucault subjectivation becomes a political site of resistance and creation, where an aesthetics of life and construction of the self gains autonomy from “power” and “knowledge”.¹⁴ It is through a practice of doubling as folding and through an understanding of subjectivation as an artistic practice that Debord, Bataille and Walser are here re-examined.

Deleuze reads Foucault’s doubling as the folding of the fractals, as going towards what he calls the rhizomatic. In Deleuze and Guattari this doubling becomes a politics and an activism of the “middle”.¹⁵ To double from the middle of where we find ourselves is to twist things starting from the place where we live, the institutions we inhabit, the relationships we entertain. This is a micropolitics tightly related to a macropolitics as a politics of institutions, organizations, planning and strategies. This non-oppositional politics does not mark the end of political struggle or the renunciation of antagonisms. Often Deleuze and Guattari are explained as pursuing a vitalism that sees everything as fluidity, their political project is interpreted as seeking the removal of all obstacles to achieve a universal mutability that will lead to a paradise of uninterrupted connectivity.¹⁶ The first problem with such an interpretation is that it projects a teleological intention onto a philosophy that by all means fights against it. To start from the middle means to act politically operating from the conditions we find ourselves involved in, instead of aiming to reach a future goal strategized in the present. Another problem with an interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari as philosophers of a happy connectivity is the erasure it produces of the moments of antagonism and *darkness* they create and make use of. The “Body without Organs” and the “War Machine” are

¹³ Deleuze, *Foucault*, London, Continuum, 1999, pp 94-123.

¹⁴ See for instance “The Return of Morality” (1984), in Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live : Interviews 1961-1984*, New York, Semiotext(e), 1996.

¹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, “Introduction: Rhizome”, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pp. 3-25.

¹⁶ See for example Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, University of Minnesota Press, 1999

examples of devices that destroy hierarchical organizations and enclosures, and are confronted in this thesis with Debord's, Bataille's and Walser's forms of de-subjectivation.

The emphasis of Deleuze and Guattari on "deterritorialization" and "lines of flight" has to be considered in a historical context and it cannot obscure the role "consistency" has in the production of a revolutionary politics.¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari's politics is also one of consistency: we cannot just have deterritorialization and de-subjectivation, we also need to produce consistency, to rebuild a density, a safety, something like the strength of a solidarity, a commoning, a cooperation – which do not exclude what is not human in the creation of new forms of life. This creation of consistency allows for a reading of Debord's, Bataille's and Walser's practices not simply as de-subjectivizing but also as offering grips to construct collective and revolutionary configurations (for a "molecular revolution").¹⁸

Mapping questions

To further clarify the problem of de-subjectivation in its complexity, it is necessary to map out a series of key questions the thesis addresses around this concept. De-subjectivation is a process through which the subject gets undone, whilst subjectivity loses coherence, stability, steadiness. De-subjectivation is a process but it can also be understood as a practice. It becomes a practice when it is not just something we are subjected to, when we intervene in the process itself, as Debord, Bataille and Walser do. This distinction between process and practice relates to an important issue the thesis deals with, that of a separation between being active and passive, being subjected and struggling against this subjection. To address these separations implies to rethink a notion of activism, of political action, against a mutually exclusive opposition between activity and passivity: de-subjectivation can involve a "subjection" whose conditions we can, at least partially, recreate on our own terms. This problem of the relationship between action and passivity, of a process which is not just the consequence of a

¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari frequently use the term "consistency" throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

¹⁸ Félix Guattari and Suely Rolnik, *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*, Los Angeles, CA, Semiotext(e), 2008

condition but it can also become an experimental practice, is variously addressed by the authors discussed in the thesis.

De-subjectivation is a form of subjectivation, it has to be understood as a specific term indicating a subtraction, a negativity, an undoing. To talk specifically of de-subjectivation is also to address another important issue: that of a conceptual coupling of creation and destruction, doing and undoing, positive and negative, and its problematization. The authors used here deal in different ways with this conceptual coupling. To rethink, case by case, the connection between creation and destruction is crucial in the context of subjectivation and its relationship to domination and to capitalism understood as the dominant system shaping our subjectivity and our lives. It is also a matter of questioning the opposition between an “evil” de-subjectivation perpetrated by capitalism, and a “good” subjectivation intended as the constitution of a subject.

A rethinking of good and evil relates to an idea of capitalism as the enemy to fight against – capitalism as a “subject”. Capitalism is defined here as the dominant system, but this domination is not monolithic, totalizing, all encompassing. Debord, Bataille and Walser rethink and transform domination and subjection through their practice and theory. Their different practices find a coherence through an antagonism to capitalism intended not just as an economic system, but as a social relation, as shaping subjectivity, as a form of life. Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari analyse capitalism in its complexity, in its capacity of contaminating, capturing, transforming everything. This capacity makes it difficult to struggle “against” it, since capitalism is not an easily graspable enemy, and it allies with innumerable others – fascism is an example discussed in the thesis, patriarchy and racism could be others. The difficulty increases since capitalism operates not only at a macro level, it also shapes our subjectivity and our bodies: it is not separated from ourselves and our lives. Through its fluidity, immateriality, flexibility, capitalism allows and needs something other than itself in order to be constantly reproduced, and this opens a myriad of possibilities for other forms of life to emerge and affirm themselves, not just fascist, racists and patriarchal, but also emancipator – “against” capitalism itself. After Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism gets here defined not as a coherent system but through its “axiomatic”, through a series of principles which, in its extreme flexibility, capitalism indispensably needs in order to function. Private

property, accumulation, profit are some of these principles: to struggle against capitalism is to attack them.¹⁹

These attacks cannot be frontal, they take the form of the doubling, folding, twisting explained above. These doublings are nonetheless antagonistic, the enemies have to be named, autonomy is autonomy from those enemies, emancipation is emancipation from them – there are “old” terms which are still very needed, even if what they name has changed, together with their context. It could be observed that capitalism in this thesis gains a weight unseen in some of the authors used here. This weight comes from a renewed urgency to experiment forms of life against and away from capitalism, an urgency coming from a new wave of anti-capitalist social movements developing everywhere since the financial crisis of 2008. The thesis reads the authors used as offering “anti-capitalist” tools for the production of new forms of life, with the aim of contributing to the current emergence of revolutionary grassroots activities and emancipatory global struggles.

For Agamben bareness is a human condition, de-subjectivation is a process affecting people. Through Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari the thesis aims to move away from a politics of subjectivation as restricted to people. Debord, Bataille and Walser show how people are never separated from everything else. If by subjectivity we understand a specification of a psychic life, where the psyche is not separated from a body, we can think of a subjectivity not only of the individual, of groups and society, but also of everything inhabiting the world.²⁰ Subjectivation can be understood as concerning plants, animals, buildings, books, films. After all, a book is alive, it changes, according to the context, to the historical period in which it is read, to the people making use of it. Debord, Bataille and Walser show us that even when starting from our individual selves, we can trigger processes of transformation that disrupt the isolation characterizing the (neoliberal) individual – not only towards a plurality of human beings but also towards a plurality where people come together with everything else: this is what is called here “ecology” as exemplified by Walser.

¹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, London, Continuum, 2004 pp 240-262.

²⁰ For Guattari this understanding of subjectivity relates to animism: Anselm Franke ed., *e-flux journal* #36, 07/12 <http://www.e-flux.com/issues/36-july-2012/>

In Debord, Bataille and Walser de-subjectivation is an artistic practice, their activism is artistic inasmuch as it is experimental. To think subjectivation as an artistic practice the meaning of art has to be rethought. Art is not just something, material or immaterial, a painting, a film, a song, that produces pleasure for us, that pleases us, and that we have to learn to appreciate. Art can be something unsettling; also, it can be something we can *use* rather than just contemplate. Pleasurable or painful, art affects us, and this affective power is something we can make use of. Art is not just something that a professional figure called “artist” can produce, it is not necessarily something defined as such by art critics and art institutions. Art is *techne*, the possibility of constructing, doing, organizing in a certain way. To paint a painting is an act of such construction, as it might be to hang the painting on a wall, or to get drunk and wander around the streets of Paris, having previously traced an arbitrary itinerary on a map. The Situationists are especially useful to reclaim a notion and a practice of art as connected with everyday situations, an art practiced by people who do not necessarily call themselves artists. Life, and life in a city, turns into a work of art beyond the confinements of an avant-garde.

How to understand the relationship between de-subjectivation and politics? As with art, politics here has to be rethought. Politics is not just something that individuals called “politicians” practice, and it is not just something defined as such by political institutions. Likewise, activism, political action, might become not just something organized by individuals called activists. If we understand politics and activism as producing changes in the organization of our collective life against the dominant system that shapes it, we need to take into consideration subjectivity as something through which we can struggle against capitalism, from within rather than in opposition to. Through practices of self-reflexivity Debord, Bataille and Walser show how subjectivity can be affected, manipulated, constructed, and how it can connect with other things, institutions, contexts. This manipulation and this potential of transformation needs to be reclaimed, explored and practiced as emancipatory from capitalism and generative of different forms of life.

Subjectivation is a process that often operates complying with the principles of capitalism: private property is also private property of the self, accumulation is accumulation for the self, enclosure is enclosure of the self. In Debord, Bataille and Walser subjectivation becomes a political practice of emancipation when those

principles get damaged, when an undoing of ourselves as individuals reconnects us to different bodies, places, contexts. What is at stake here is ourselves, our bodies, and how we live, think, speak, love, desire. A capitalist subjectivation creates individualized subjects, enclosed, private, and separated, but at the same time, in its contemporary neoliberal version, it creates subjects which are flexible, competitive, adjustable to hierarchies. To guarantee this neoliberal flexibility the subject has to be de-subjectivized, and often violently so: you feel lost, you don't know who you are anymore, you have no more certainties. Neoliberalism capitalizes on this de-subjectivation, re-forging highly adaptable (working) subjects. Debord, Bataille and Walser can be used to provide practical answers to this crucial question: how to produce political transformations starting and departing from the specific forms of control, separation and individuation capitalism exercises?

Methodology

The methodology shaping the writing and structuring of the thesis was developed through the material used. Writing this thesis has also implied learning to activate the readings: reading a book, watching a movie, seeing an exhibition and opening up the possibility of their practical, potential, political effects, instead of simply reproducing them in the form of a piece of knowledge to sustain an argument. You read, see, experience something and you try to put into practice what you learn from it. To put into practice what you learn is to re-combine, re-assemble, re-knead: to knead again the text, yourself, your context, the issues it carries with it. You read Agamben, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, and you read them also as practitioners, you learn their research methods: this thesis develops a methodology of re-kneading, this is the sense that doubling and folding acquire.

The thesis is “about” de-subjectivation as much as it “de-subjectivizes” the material used, as it records a de-subjectivizing experiment I have undergone while writing this thesis, it provides examples of a de-subjectivation that can be taken up and operate in different contexts – a de-subjectivation offering grips for a re-composition, for the creation of consistency. De-subjectivation affects not only a subject (myself, the book I read and write again, the film I watch and talk about) but also its possible contexts. To make use of a text (a film, an exhibition) implies not so much an understanding of the

text and the communication of its meaning, but an undoing of the text and its recomposition (its re-kneading) in the context of a here and now, of myself, living in this city, working as a teacher, of ourselves living in a place like London, working and studying in the neoliberal university, trying to organize differently our lives in the neighbourhood. To make use of a text is also to expose myself to it, to allow for myself to get undone, de-subjectified through it, to open up towards it in such a way to be affected – and then record the traces on paper. You get affected by a theoretical text as if it was art, and you write it again as if what you do is art, as something that has the power to affect in turn, to trigger a transformation. To make use of a text is also to ask the question: what can we learn from it? What devices, apparatuses, machines of subjectivation can be learned and used to practice an emancipatory politics?

When I started writing this thesis I spent some time re-writing texts of Agamben, trying to “de-subjectivize” them, to undo their philosophical framework and its meaningfulness, to take up their transformative potential starting from a “nothing” I had, a nothing they were offering – a nothing like a sense of political paralysis and at the same time the possibility of somehow activating it.²¹ I was soon told by a friend that this writing was not making sense. I then tried to create a consistency for the thesis out of this attempt of writing again whilst undoing a wider intelligibility. Undoing the texts involved an attempt of undoing myself, getting affected by the texts, putting myself in a condition that would even prevent me to clearly understand their meaning, reading texts too closely, getting absent-minded, losing myself into details, misreading, reading without a purpose, forgetting the purpose of writing a PhD, writing “without ends”.

This process has been driven by an urgency of putting theory immediately into practice: into reading, writing, thinking, acting, and at some point also organizing and organizing collectively. De-subjectivation affects this practice, which becomes not knowing what you are doing, repeating again and again, coming back to yourself when you try to get rid of yourself. Everything could be included into this experiment, your entire life, and when everything enters this process the impression of being by yourself, you and your books, gets disrupted. The process opens up to include other things you come across, and a consistency materializes.

²¹ This possibility relates again with Agamben’s “tiny displacement” applied to a contemporary condition defined in its negativity.

Each chapter of the thesis is shaped and structured differently, according to the influence Debord, Bataille and Walser exercise on the research method, according to their different modes of de-subjectivation. It is again an affective contamination that you allow to happen, a contamination partially out of control, accompanied by the attempt to re-create something like a method, a set of tools, a manual of exercises to be taken up again.

The first chapter has been re-written several times, it has been slowly sedimented. It stays close to a reading of the texts: a couple of pages written by Agamben on the practice of “constructed situations” function as the thread that brings together the continuous *derives* of the chapter – from Debord to Foucault, Nietzsche and the *commedia dell’arte*. *Derive* and *detournement* are the artistic techniques presented and contextualized here, and they have a strong impact on the unfolding of the chapter: you read about *derive*, you write about *derive*, you get affected by *derives*, and you end up writing *derives*. With Bataille and Walser it is harder to define specific techniques. In this sense the second chapter is the most *difficult*: Bataille is programmatically difficult to categorize, especially with the writings used here, those written before the end of the second world war. Bataille offers a methodology of the collapse of every method, and to be open towards this collapse is to get lost in a different way from a *derive*, where you always keep or create signposts. Walser as well offers a methodology of getting lost, not as carefully constructed as with the Situationists, and not as dramatically absolute as with Bataille. Walser continuously undoes human parameters, proposing something and undoing it immediately after, but also producing something like a strange sense of delight, for a de-subjectivation of little fragmentations.

Structure

The thesis develops a methodology of de-subjectivizing and re-kneading, a methodology of being affected, drifting away, getting lost on the verge of collapse, losing parameters and recomposing the fragments into a consistency. This methodology opens up many possible paths and the whole project always risks to go astray. To prevent this, to focus on the main question of de-subjectivation as discussed through Agamben and consequently Debord, Bataille and Walser, the “drifts” departing from this discussion are placed in appendix. The body of the text deals with the main concern

of the thesis, a critical evaluation of de-subjectivation as carrying a political potential of emancipation. The appendix gathers and records moments when de-subjectivation drifts to different contexts, departing from the discussion that from Agamben leads to Debord, Bataille and Walser.

The body of the thesis gains a consistency in itself, it responds to a specific problem, articulated through the connections explained in this introduction. It stands in itself and it can be read by itself. The appendix gathers the effects of de-subjectivation produced alongside the development of the main argument. To use a notion coming from Deleuze and Guattari, it could be said that those effects are lines of flight departing from the body of the thesis. They are affective movements of imagination, as well as connections to the ways ideas around de-subjectivation developed in the thesis relate to wider social situations and contexts. They proceed from those ideas, hence their “alongside” position. And if we think the thesis as a manual for an artistic and political practice of de-subjectivation, we could read the material in appendix as examples of further practical exercises that suggest different possible applications for the tools and contents of the manual.

Alongside the first chapter we find in appendix examples of artworks, films and exhibitions interpreted through Agamben’s reading of constructed situation as a form of theatre through which de-subjectivation is conducted. The account of Radio Alice exemplifies the use of Situationist techniques in a context where they produce a form of communication which also constitutes a collective form of life.

Alongside the second chapter we find in appendix an account of the Grinberg Method and its bodily techniques that resemble those created by Bataille: this case reiterates the argument the chapter develops around the importance of de-subjectivation in the formation of ourselves as neoliberal workers. An account of the second world war, experienced at the border between Italy and Austria, at the same time when Bataille writes his *Summa Atheologica*, shows a comparable uncertainty of the rigidity of national identities during the conflict. A reality TV on the fashion industry is taken as an example of what Deleuze and Guattari call microfascism. A personal account of a Christmas spent in my hometown exemplifies manifestations of Berlusconi subjectivation. The films of Lucio Fulci and the experience with the collective project Summer Drafts are presented as tools of struggle against such subjectivation, as

modalities to de-subjectivize otherwise. Summer Drafts offers an example of a collective de-subjectivation, and it also raises the question, after de-subjectivation what?

Alongside the third chapter we find in appendix a widening of the analysis of today's state of academia, as developed in the body of the thesis, in relation to radical pedagogy. It follows an account of Summer Drafts 2, presented as an experience in radical pedagogy and as a possible alternative to the model of the neoliberal university. The discussion of schizoanalysis in relation to Walser finds in Summer Drafts 2 some exemplifications: the role of the teacher is implicitly shifted towards that of the schizoanalyst. An account of a session of Body / Mind Centering provides an example of "un-powering" related to Walser's de-subjectivation as undermining hierarchical structures. A project organized for the university attempts an engagement with the neighbourhood as a way to produce learning beyond the academic walls. The appendix ends with an account of the violence of the police against people demonstrating in Parliament Square in 2011, and a reading of the (micro)political potential of transformation of the student movement.

Art and activism every day – some encounters

First encounter: a conversation across balconies

A few years ago, whilst sitting in my room in Bolzano, writing my MA dissertation, I heard a conversation amongst neighbours taking place across balconies. A group of women were sitting on their balconies, talking to each other. The dissertation I was writing was dealing with different declinations of a notion of community, the section I was dealing with that day was titled "The Room". Through the dissertation I was trying to define "community" by recording a series of textual, visual, cinematic, and other more quotidian encounters. The conversation between my neighbours immediately became part of the dissertation: I inserted a brief account of the conversation, and I built a context for it, talking about the housing block, the neighbourhood and its history, my grandmother, who used to live down the road.

Housewives talking across balconies, talking about holidays - one of them had just returned from the south of Italy; they were talking about food, I didn't pay much

attention to the topic of the conversation, I was enrapt by the sound of the chatting, the way it was entering my room, from different directions. By writing that conversation as an example of what I was trying to call “community” I felt that the encounter had somehow exhausted itself. But soon the conversation across balconies started haunting me: what is its political relevance? Could such a conversation be considered as having a political relevance in any way? If yes, what sort of politics is here at play?

Second encounter: Mujeres Creando

The second encounter I would like to define is that with Mujeres Creando. Mujeres Creando is a group of women working together as a collective in La Paz, Bolivia. They could be labelled in many ways: activists, artists, feminists, anarchists, and so on. They work in different ways, they organize what they call "actions", a kind of happening or street theatre, they write graffiti, they make TV programs, they publish a magazine, they have a website, they organize demonstrations, they run a hostel / social centre with a bar, they often work in collaboration with other groups, such as organizations of prostitutes, cocaleras, deuderas. This is a group of women very different from the housewives living in Bolzano. I was asked to meet at the airport two members of Mujeres Creando, Maria and Rosario, when they came to London to take part in a conference organized by republicart and the Goldsmiths Visual Cultures Department. I spent three days with Maria and Rosario, enough time to fall in love with them.

In the taxi on the way to the hotel Maria was excited, looking at the invasion of huge advertising boards along the road. She explained that in Bolivia there was nothing comparable to that spectacle. She got excited because, as she told me, if capitalism is so much advanced in this country, the resistance to it should be even stronger than in Bolivia. Maria then asked me about resistance to capitalism and fight against globalisation in a place like London. Resistance? Fight? I got embarrassed, I didn't know what to answer, I said something like: “Yes, resistance... fight... yes, there is, in some way..., there is someone, something...”.

For the conference at the Camden Arts Centre, Maria and Rosario gave a presentation that was more like a performance. Maria was holding Rosario on her shoulders whilst reading a sort of manifesto and talking about the activities of Mujeres Creando. In the

meantime Rosario was burning a piece of cardboard she was holding in her hands. They showed a couple of videos, the first of them was an edited recording of an “action” which they organized in a square of La Paz: Maria is holding a child on her shoulders and the child is throwing crosses on the ground, as many crosses as the number of people killed and disappeared under the Bolivian dictatorship that year. Maria is throwing buckets of blood on the ground and almost on the feet of a group of policeman. A heavily made up lady with a fur around her neck is blaming Maria for the silliness of her acts. This character is often present in Mujeres Creando's actions, she personifies the middle class woman, and functions as a sort of intermediary between, in this case, Maria and the public, criticising wittily the actions of Mujeres Creando. Maria engages in a fight with the police and the video ends with her being forced into a police car.

The music is entirely dramatic, the camera is shaking. One of the things that struck me about the video is that if seen as a contemporary art video (and the conference took place at Camden Arts Centre), it could be defined, technically, as the work of an amateur. And yet, or maybe because of that, it seemed to me overwhelming. The combination of the overdramatic music with the shaky movement of the camera, the uncoordinated editing and the images themselves, make of it something quite different from either video art or from the documentation of a riot.

I could provide a number of explanations to justify the excitement that Mujeres Creando's presentation provoked in me, but all of them would be of a rather psychological nature: I would like to avoid them. There are more complex reasons to explain my excitement than, for instance, the fascination I had for a woman with an extraordinary personality, and therefore for her work. If I got excited, the reaction of the rest of the public in the conference seemed rather cold. The public was certainly different from the one Maria is accustomed to in the streets of La Paz. The discussion became more animated afterwards in the pub, after a few glasses of wine, but during the conference the responses were mostly related to the academically incorrect language Maria was using: you cannot say you are outside the system, you are not outside, no one is outside, and so on. There were also a series of nostalgic responses: “ah yes, we too were operating like that thirty years ago, but now this doesn't work here anymore...” So, why was I even more in love, even more passionate, whilst no one else seemed to get excited about them? I was sure there was more in Mujeres Creando's actions than

just a naive, romanticized practice of political confrontation. The political impulse informing their actions needed to be sought somewhere other than in their manifestos or their ideological positions. The question returns: what sort of political? Which kind of political action?

A failed encounter? Activism

These two cases seem to be opposite to each other: on the one hand there is a seemingly apolitical, or politically passive group of housewives, on the other a "hyperpolitical" and actively engaged *Mujeres Creando*.

I would like to introduce a third element: "political activism", or what might be called a failed encounter, presided over by a question mark.

Throughout the years spent in Bologna studying for my BA, I felt a strong fascination towards people I associated with political engagement, people I perceived as "activists". I was identifying the characteristics of the activist with certain features like having long hair, dressing in a sloppy way, going to *centri sociali*, perhaps smoking joints. Although at that time I fulfilled all these requirements, I still wasn't able to become part of what I recognized as being the "activist community". A failed encounter with activism?

Years later, whilst studying an MA at Goldsmiths in the Visual Cultures department, during a "Geographies" class, Irit Rogoff talked about globalization and anti-global movements in conjunction with Derrida's assertion that there is no outside to the text. For once I dared to open my mouth in class to reply that no, there is an outside of activism, you either are an activist or not (the outside here returns upside-down: *Mujeres Creando* being outside the system, myself located at a point outside of activism). Irit in turn explained why there was no outside to activism. I don't remember what the explanation was, its meaning got lost on the blushing of my face, but a question stayed with me: what sort of activism was Irit talking about? How are we to understand an activism that doesn't require identification, that does not give itself in accordance with a determinate set of common features?

This will not be an activism of the kind: “everyone is an activist in his or her own way” (as “everyone is an artist”). What I will try to do here is not simply to expand the category of activism (and art), erasing its boundaries and implementing a universalist form of the activist practice. I would like to think and practice activism (and art), to interrogate what activism as political action can possibly do. I’m adding this paragraph after looking into Wikipedia’s definition of “Activism”. The page starts like this: “Although the word ‘activist’ often conjures the image of a radical, semi-crazy person who just can’t put up with authority [this could be a description of Mujeres Creando], an activist is really just someone who thinks carefully about how she or he wants to live life, and is not always satisfied with the way things get done through the conventional political process [this description could perhaps be applied to some housewives living in Bolzano]. When we look at activism this way, it becomes possible for all of us to be activists in our own way.”

These words seem to reflect the fascinating dream of the change of humanity into a society of activists. I keep being fascinated, and repelled at the same time, reading this page of instructions for everyone to become an activist. I can’t help being attracted by the attention to the small gestures this activism is characterized by (“there are thousand more everyday heroes...”). The main section of the page is titled “Everyday Activism”. Is not this, somehow, the drive behind my own project: to politicize everything, including practices that are not necessarily perceived as political? And what follows is a sort of handbook for the “everyday activist”, a translation of the everyday into a set of instructions to follow: “Critical thought! This cannot be stressed enough”... “An inquiring mind! Research!”... “Communication!”... “An open mind!”... “Commitment! This is not a scary word.”... “Positive outlook! This one can be hard...” But this thesis does not foster the attempt of universally spreading “politics” as an all encompassing category, it has not to do with activism as commitment to a cause, making the cause little and digestible and everyday enough, for everyone to agree taking it on his or her shoulders.

And yet it is not easy for me to deal with this page, with its desire to create a universal community of everyday activists, engaged in the smallest trivialities and minutia of their lives.

I therefore double this wiki page, its call to an everyday activism of the individual: smile to your neighbour and turn the shower off when you soap yourself, the little things to be changed in everyone's life, all together. I double this here with another passage on "activism", taken from a discussion between Deleuze and Foucault on the proliferation of centres of "revolutionary movement", on the geographically discontinuous points of a network, emerging locally everywhere and extending worldwide through transversal connections. This passage is here to reformulate the alternative to an activism based on belonging, identity, opposition, an activism of the inside and outside, of a separation between the ones who do radical politics and know how to do it, and an unpolitical mass. The passage is here also to push activism beyond the personal responsibility that Wikipedia's "everyday activism" is calling for, beyond a logic of the individual citizen turning off the shower (those responsible for the privatization of water won't easily turn their showers off...).

"DELEUZE: In this context, I must return to the question: the present revolutionary movement has created multiple centres, and not as the result of weakness or insufficiency, since a certain kind of totalization pertains to power and reactionary forces. (Vietnam, for instance, is an impressive example of localized counter-tactics). But how are we to define the networks, the transversal links between these active and discontinuous points, from one country to another or within a single country?

FOUCAULT: The question of geographical discontinuity which you raise might mean the following: as soon as we struggle against exploitation, the proletariat not only leads the struggle but also defines its targets, its methods, and the places and instruments for confrontation; and to ally oneself with the proletariat is to accept its positions, its ideology, and its motives for combat. This means total identification. But if the fight is directed against power, then all those on whom power is exercised to their detriment, all who find it intolerable, can begin the struggle on their own terrain and on the basis of their proper activity (or passivity)."²²

In this passage Deleuze and Foucault think about the transformation of political struggles, from a centralized model to a dispersed one. Struggles proliferate across a different scale. This does not necessarily mean that struggles become weaker: the

²² Deleuze and Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power", in Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1977, pp. 215-216.

battlefield has shifted and is shifting, it has penetrated into people's everyday lives, into their balconies, into the habits of a bunch of housewives, into their chatting, their gestures. Hence the importance of bringing together micro, even imperceptible weapons, small weapons, not entirely controllable, for a micro battle, an everyday struggle everywhere, each of us on our "own terrain", each of us with our knowledge, competences, tools, with our activity or passivity, but no less connected or connectable in some way.

A shift takes place from an activity based on mass-scale identification (the "proletariat" here, humanity or Western humanity in Wikipedia, resulting from a sum of individuals), with defined targets, methods, places and instruments for confrontation, to a "struggle" that is grounded on specific activities (or passivities), but is also transversal, transversal to individuals, groups, institutions, triggered by a sort of sentiment, a finding something "intolerable", something like an emotion that itself indicates the extent to which the battle takes place within the micro of our daily lives, our supposedly less significant feelings.

Activism: a rehearsal of three questions

"What are the new types of struggle, which are transversal and immediate rather than centralized and mediated? What are the 'intellectual's' new functions, which are specific or 'particular' rather than universal? What are the new modes of subjectivation, which tend to have no identity? This is the present triple root of the question: What can I do, What do I know, What am I? The events which led up to 1968 were like a 'rehearsal' of these three questions."²³

Deleuze rewrites here Foucault, in a sort of continuation of their discussion above. A shift takes place from the centralized and mediated to the transversal and the immediate. From a universal intellectual, as an individuated figure embracing a universal field of competences (the Sartrean model for instance), to a "specific" (Foucault's term) or "singular" (Deleuze's term) intellectual: the specific worker of a whatever profession,

²³ Deleuze, "The Folds or the Inside of Thought (Subjectivation)" in Deleuze, *Foucault*, London, Continuum, 1999, p 115

every profession, with its specific knowledge and competences (the housewife for instance).

We begin then with a “repetition” (in the Italian translation), with a “rehearsal” of three inextricable questions driving the events of ’68: the question of political potential (what can I do?), the question of the “specific intellectual” (what do I know by doing what I’m doing?), and the question of the self, of subjectivation (what am I and how would I become?). Again, a quote from Deleuze/Foucault helps to set the ground for the dissertation. The quote is important for the three questions it (re)poses: three “immemorial” questions that through and beyond the events leading to ’68 acquire their specificity. The three questions return, repeated, reformulated. They are not only reformulated, they are “rehearsed”, performed again. We (re)start with the repetition of these questions and with the proposal to rehearse them again. I will not only talk about repetitions, doublings, rehearsals, I will also repeat, double, and rehearse. Already in this quote from Deleuze this rehearsal acts on a temporal plane: three immemorial questions, questions whose origin cannot be located in a chronological linearity of time, get reshaped in a time of events congregating upon a specific date, 1968; and yet, at the same time, these questions are launched somewhere else, to be picked up in some other time.

The first question, “what can I do?” becomes a question about “new kind of struggles”, organized in a different way, “immediate”, not mediated through a system of representation with its hierarchies (parties and unions), not centralized or divided according to groups and institutions that function as inclusive/exclusive attractors (the “proletariat” in Foucault’s example above). It is always transversal to identitarian, social, cultural, geographical categories (transversal to my self as a political subject, to the activists *Mujeres Creando* and the housewives in Bolzano).

The second question, “what do I know?” is also a question operating transversally. Foucault produces a shift from the “general” (“universal” in Deleuze’s terms) to the “specific” intellectual, by tearing apart the category of the intellectual as a socially recognized figure.²⁴ The specific intellectual is not so much an intellectual with a specific knowledge, standing against an intellectual encompassing a variety of fields of

²⁴ Foucault, “The Political Function of the Intellectual”, *Radical Philosophy* 17, Summer 1977: 12-14

knowledge – general and specific are not oppositional here. The term “specific” opens up to something like a “whoever”: the intellectual is whoever uses his or her own specific knowledge, skills and competences, gained in whatever conditions and on whichever “terrain” (the housewife as well as the teacher), in order to produce critical thought to be shared, and to organize collective and transversal actions. This type of intellectual is specific not in the sense that is part of a specific category: it is specific in itself, it is “singular” as Deleuze says. In a way this specific intellectual is more general than a “general” intellectual, because he or she, or, better, *us* in our plurality, could be everyone and everywhere, with our own specific activities (or passivities): a housewife as a specific intellectual, with the knowledge she gains on her “terrain” (which is not only the “house”, but also the balconies and much else). This indicates again a proliferation of “discontinuous points” of struggle, the battle penetrates into the apparent banality and irrelevance of everybody’s occupations, through the connection and recombination of different terrains.²⁵

The third question, “what am I?” is a question concerning identity, a question on “new modes of subjectivation”. Subjectivation is a process, it is the mode through which a subject gets constituted and constitutes itself. In his last years Foucault increasingly turned to the mode of subjectivation at stake for the ancient Greeks and Romans.²⁶ His aim was to determine the extent to which a different time in history could give rise to a set of resonances with our own time, to understand in what sense we could learn something from ancient modes of subjectivation, something that would help us to produce “new” modes, modes that would not correspond to the ones which dominate and constitute our *present* time. Deleuze talks here about modes of subjectivation without identity. To rehearse the question of political identity in this way implies a certain critique of the logic of identity politics: the belief that to be identifiable on the basis of a clear set of categories, to have a national, cultural or political identity, would result in something like a political empowerment. Departing from a struggle for recognition that is always circumscribed by the logic of representative politics, Deleuze

²⁵ When Agamben takes up Foucault’s work, starting from the first volume of *Homo Sacer* and working through Foucault’s notion of “biopolitics”, he moves in the opposite direction, from the specific to the universal: “homo sacer” becomes a paradigmatic condition that originates from the Roman origins of Western jurisprudence (Agamben’s general intellectual). Agamben, “Introduction”, in *Homo Sacer*, Stanford University Press, 1998, pp 9-14.

²⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2 *The Use of Pleasure*, London, Penguin Books, 1987 and Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 3, *The Care of the Self*, London, Penguin Books, 1988, but also many other texts and interviews.

puts forward a struggle for the unrecognizable, for what cannot be identified, a struggle that leaves the self fundamentally affected.

Hence subjectivation moves here not towards the constitution of an identity, but its dismantling. We are today subjected and controlled in ever more complex ways, not only as subjects anchored to an identity. “Becoming indiscernible” is not so much a matter for Deleuze and Guattari to play hide and seek with “power”, a strategy for not being caught, a way of retreating. The battlefield itself has become more articulated, its mechanisms less discernible, it extends from the macro to the micro, from institutions to subjectivities and subjectivation. Power has penetrated our very bodies, taking hold of the less perceptible facets of our lives, and micropolitics gains a new urgency.

What is at stake with micropolitics cannot be ascribed as a single, readily identifiable register, it will not allow itself to be easily perceived, grasped, named or individuated: desires, affects and intensities, insignificant gestures (... a conversation across balconies). What Foucault calls “power” permeates all of this, the body, subjectivity, or that something that has no name to receive, something that psychoanalysis, for example, has been preoccupied with naming, categorizing and ordering, with its idea of an unconscious as a little box at the back of our head: desire as lack, imprisoned within an enclosed theatre of representation. This is why Deleuze talks about a subjectivation without identity: we are gripped and controlled in our gestures, desires, intensities, and it is here as well that political struggles have to be (and are) carried out. New types of struggle, new forms of producing knowledge, new modes of subjectivation, these are the three intertwined aspects informing an activism located after the experience of '68. What I argue is that these three questions are still here, these “new” types of struggles, knowledge, subjectivation, emerge today (also) through experiences and practises experimented before 1968, provoked by the *untimeliness* of Debord, Bataille and Walser.

Chapter 1

Spectacular life: from enforced appearances to a passion for exposure (Guy Debord)

“What strikes me is the fact that, in our society, art has become something that is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life. That art is something which is specialized and done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art?”²⁷ Foucault

“The aesthetic paradigm does not coincide with the word of the artists.”²⁸ Guattari

What can we do with Debord today, what can we learn from his books and his films, from the characters he has created of himself? How can we use Debord to get over ourselves, to politicize ourselves and everything else, in a process of revolutionary becoming? How to avoid turning Debord into an academic object of research, how to avoid aestheticizing, neutralizing Debord, by accommodating him into a history of art, a history of politics? To prolong the encounter of your body with his body: Debord is not just on the streets, he is also within, and outside, on a balcony, on the streets, speaking through a radio...

This thesis attempts to extrapolate from “art” (Debord's books, films, his own persona) a series of reusable techniques (constructed situations - *dérive* and *détournement* as techniques). Art implies a *techne*, a set of skills, a know-how, a savoir faire, and its technology is constituted by certain ways of composing, organizing, bringing different elements together. All this is “construction” in the situationist sense of “constructed situations”. Situation is what this *techne* brings about, it is what happens through the arrangement, something that exceeds construction but is nonetheless inseparable from it. There is no relation of cause and effect between art's construction and the situation provoked. If art's *techne* is transmittable and reusable, what art makes happen is largely unforeseeable: “situation” concerns something possible, it is not reducible to the calculable. Another way of saying this, with Deleuze and Guattari, is that art creates

²⁷ Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics”, in *Essential Foucault. Ethics*, p 261.

²⁸ Guattari, “El paradigma estetico”, interview with Fernando Urribarri.

<http://www.cinosargo.cl/content/view/215369/Guattari-El-paradigma-estetico.html>

affects: we can create configurations that affect us through forces that are generated through ourselves, but not by ourselves.²⁹

Art is an arrangement, it is a disassembling and reassembling of differential elements. The elements assembled are not just the materials the artist uses to create an artwork: the assemblage involves much more, art assembles potentially a cosmos (another sense in which construction and situation are inseparable). And the “artist” is not separated from the “artwork”, from the “viewer”, or from everything else, material and immaterial, visible and less visible: colours, light, rhythms, forces... Art is always more than *techne*, and it is always something more than an artist: it exceeds the subject creating it, with his or her intentions, skills, and inspirations. Art is something else than a transposition of skilfully executed ideas onto, let’s say, a piece of paper. There is a *techne* the artist uses, but there is also something else that the artist cannot and does not entirely control. These two aspects of art, construction and situation, are not two ingredients: they are a complex articulation, always in motion, moving itself as well as something else.

This conception of art intersect with a certain determination of activism, allowing us to rethink what activism could be. A practice of organizing political action, activism is not just a *techne*, a series of skills applied in accordance with a given set of protocols. Activism is not necessarily a series of actions that a subject organizes, practices or performs. Activism can be something that, like art, is not exhaustible in a *techne* and something that is not reducible to a series of results predetermined by an acting subject. From here a question arises: to what extent should we construct and to what extent should we let happen, when we act (politically)? In terms of the dichotomy between construction and situation, it is not a matter of balancing action and passion, act and non-act. Rather, through “activism” a re-articulation takes place, a disassembling and reassembling that cuts across the need for agency on one side and its negation on the other. Something is made *and* something happens: activism is not necessarily acting, it can also produce a reconfiguration in such a way that something happens to us and to the arrangement.

There is something more specific to art and activism as presented in this thesis. What art and activism make happen, will also happen to the subjects who construct the situation.

²⁹ In Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, Verso, 1994.

The artist cannot separate him or herself from art, from the process of creation that art sets in motion, from the dis-assemblage and re-assemblage that art involves. The activist subjects cannot separate themselves from the process of disassembling and reassembling that activism implies. Your body, your subjectivity, your persona as an artist, writer, activist, or housewife: each of these are affected in turn by this process. What would art, activism, or this thesis be, if the possibility of dis-assemblage was precluded in advance? The agent of an action is always encompassed by a process of re-articulation, a process which ensures it is at the same time acted upon. Such an action is not always a matter of mastery, skills, and techniques, it might be a matter of doing without our mastery and skills: to open ourselves to a vulnerability, to construct situations in which we can afford to undo ourselves, interrogating the terms for our disassembling and creating the conditions for an affection to happen: this is the overarching schema of Debord's (Bataille's and Walser's) art, and it constitutes what could be called their activism.

I speak of subjectivity, of our bodies, of micropolitics, to use a term that comes from the thought and the practice of Deleuze and Guattari. To think micropolitics is to expand and transform a notion of politics, from politics as dealing with institutions to politics as dealing (also) with subjectivity, with processes of subjectivation: politics is not consolidated around the notion of a subject and its oppression, repression and alienation, as conditions to be eradicated in order to recuperate a real subject and a spontaneous subjectivity. Broadly speaking, one could say that politics has to be thought with Marx and Freud but beyond them, a politics of the "inner side" of us as well as the "outer side" of us. Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari constantly undo this inside / outside binary, in order to practice a politics of what is not necessarily visible and perceivable, a politics not just of people, by people and for people (political subjects), but of someone else, of something else to come (I don't want to think of myself as a general subject, because there is always something else to become).

Activism, let's make an example: we organize a series of actions to protest against the privatization of water. I do something not just for other people but for myself as well, since everyone gets affected by the consequences of the privatization of water. You organize a campaign and a referendum, and the government has to (momentarily) stop the process of privatization. In this example there is a clear goal, there is a strategy you build, there are competences involved, there is a victory (which happened in Italy in

2011), and all these elements are very important. But there are other elements that are less easy to trace, that have to do with the impact on subjectivity that such a process implies, the relationships created amongst different people, the bodies of people meeting with their banners in a square, perhaps even a different relationship with water itself, with other natural elements, and the emerging of a different sensitivity... Those “micro” aspects, that in turn involve something like a “micro-struggle”, are not always taken in consideration, what matters is often the goal and the plan to attain it (precarious in this case). In the thesis I will talk of an activism without clear goals, an activism where the imperceptible becomes part of the struggle, a struggle that is anti-capitalist, as the title states, and therefore also implies a struggle with ourselves. The aim here is not to establish an essence of activism, or to assert one kind of activism over another, but to affirm activism, the possibility for political struggle, as that which takes place, and which can only take place, through our life: activism not as a profession, not as an ethical commitment of the individual, but as an art of life.

Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari have shown how power, control, subjection, are exercised not only at the macro level of institutions, parties, governments and nation states, not only across the formal subjects these entities instantiate, but also at the level of subjectivities and the body. What does it mean to empower ourselves in the face of neoliberal power? Instead of taking power, of struggling against power, of resisting to power, we deal with forces in a different way, we bend them, says Deleuze, following Foucault. We try to twist things, to recreate some of the rules of the game by ourselves. Capitalism, the dominant system today, has to be destroyed, and we (have to) contribute to this destruction, which never leaves us untouched. No matter how unorthodox or unapparent activism is, what it does is to damage the dominant system and to create something else: something emerges... something happens... Debord is exemplary of this activism. To disassemble and reassemble always involves some kind of violence which never leaves us unscathed, since we are not separated from the dominant system, since we are part of the spectacle.

The following paragraphs serve as guidelines for a chapter that, despite (or because of) being largely based on the analysis of two pages written by Agamben on “constructed

situation”,³⁰ often gets carried away along disparate lines, with a series of detours (*dérives*) that are not always functional for a single argument.

1. First of all, Debord’s reading of capitalism as spectacle will be discussed: capitalism as a compulsion for life to become visible, as turning life into spectacle, as reducing it onto the surface of a series of images. Debord is an activist, a “strategist” as he defines himself:³¹ to conceive of society as a spectacle is not to provide a sociological analysis of contemporary conditions; the question at stake is – what can we potentially gain from the becoming spectacle of our lives? What are the new forms of struggle that become possible for us, what are the new possibilities of destroying capitalism? If we are compelled to appear as empty images, if social life becomes a meaningless theatre, if identities and categories tend to be emptied out, what is the advantage we can nevertheless derive in our “war” against capitalism?

2. A second aspect discussed here is the model of “constructed situations” as formulated and enacted by Debord and the Situationists. As anticipated above, constructed situations can be used to trace a movement from art to activism, where a *techne* comes together with the creation of affects, a transformation of subjectivity, and the emergence of new forms of life.

3. Both *dérive* and *détournement* as practiced by the Situationist International are activist tools. *Dérive* is more than a sensorial experience of an urban environment and its analysis. It experiments with a different relation to the city, a relation that, walk after walk, aims at reshaping the city itself, opening the possibility for imagining a transformation of the city, the creation of a different city and a different life in it.

4. *Détournement* can be translated into English as rerouting, and in addition as a taking over (power). *Détournement* in Debord is more than an artistic technique for

³⁰ Agamben, "Marginal Notes on Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle" in *Means without Ends : Notes on Politics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, pp 78-80.

³¹ At the beginning of his essay on Debord’s cinema, Agamben refers to a conversation he had with Debord, where Debord says to the Italian philosopher: “I’m not a philosopher, I’m a strategist”. This affirmation could be read as marking the shift in Debord from philosophical critique to a different way of engaging with an “object” of critique, or more specifically, to a different way of engaging with your “enemy”. In this formulation, the shift already moves beyond Agamben’s philosophical interpretation of Debord, who seems to say: “I am not a philosopher as you are, Agamben. Stop listening and reading me as if I were a philosopher!” Agamben, “Difference and Repetition: on Guy Debord’s films”, in Tom McDonough ed., *Guy Debord and the Situationist International : Texts and Documents*, Cambridge, Mass. ; London, MIT Press, 2002, p 319.

manipulating texts or images. It is a technique that makes use of what is readily available so as to render it something else. It does that through a process of disassemblage and reassemblage. What is available to us is also what we fight against, our enemy, the spectacle itself, as something which is never separated from ourselves and our lives. *Détournement* is a non-oppositional tool for struggle, it is like (literally and bodily) taking the enemy from behind.

5. *Détournement* provokes temporal displacements, the material detoured, coming from a past insofar as it necessarily precedes us, gets reactivated in conjunction with us, today. This is how (via Agamben) *détournement* will be related here with the eternal return. The eternal return, considered as an artistic technique, opens up the possibility of understanding and practicing *détournement* as something engaging, in the first place, with the body of the “technicians”.

6. In his last film, *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, Debord stages himself, his body, his persona, his biography, in order to submit the spectacle to an extraordinary attack. Here Debord moves from exercising a corrosive critique of the spectacle, to performing a corrosive attack on the spectacle by way of traversing the separation between himself as the subject and the object of critique, between himself and the spectacle.

7. A final aspect discussed in the chapter is Debord’s passion for strategy. This is not an entirely rational strategy, but a passionate one, an “artistic” strategy, an affective one, not entirely authored, and not marked by an end to be reached. What sense could we give to Debord’s obsession for strategies, wars and battles? What sense could we give to a “game of war” today?

The entire chapter is constructed through the reading of two texts on Debord written by Agamben.³² I use these two texts as a basis to discuss Debord, and at the same time I will constantly submit them to a certain form of critique. The discussion will wander off in various directions. Agamben offers an interesting re-reading of Debord, a reading that responds to our times, but this reading is often a sanitizing one, Debord gets integrated

³² Agamben, "Marginal Notes on Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle" *op. cit.*, pp 78-80 and Agamben, "Difference and Repetition: on Guy Debord's films", *op. cit.*

into Agamben's philosophy of balance and suspension. Hence, the chapter will also provide an attempt to release Debord from Agamben's reading.

1 Constructed situations, *dérive* and *détournement*

"We are living in a strange time today, even if maybe all times had something equally strange. Nonetheless, our time seems to me very, very strange; especially when, as I am doing now, I put a finger on the nose to think of what could be this life that we push with all the strength on the stage. [...] If the phenomenon will continue with such an impetuosity, life will soon end lying flat like a phthisic, drained and knackered up, whilst theatre will be fat, corpulent and stuffed, like an engineer who made a fortune with the products patented with his talent and now allows himself everything the world offers in terms of pleasures."³³

Spectacle as a theatre everywhere

The spectacle can be understood as a theatre everywhere. Debord does not talk much of theatre in his writings, but Agamben in his text on constructed situations makes a comparison between different theatrical practices and those of the Situationist International.³⁴

What Debord calls "society of the spectacle" is characterized by the importance conferred on appearance: everyone and everything has to appear, to become something like a living image, in order to get some spectacular value. Society is spectacular in the sense of a theatre everywhere, every place becomes a stage upon which we are compelled to act.

People in the streets sometimes seem to come out from a TV advert, a Hollywood movie, a magazine cover, not only because of the way they dress, but because of their gestures, the intensity of their gazes, the tone of their voices, the way they walk and turn their heads with a sudden movement, whilst the wind ruffles their hair.

³³ Robert Walser, "Bugie in scena", in *Storie che danno da pensare*, Adelphi, 2007, p 48.

³⁴ Agamben, "Marginal Notes on Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle" *op. cit.*, pp 78-80.

What could be the relation between theatre and politics here? In Agamben we could read this relation as coming from Hannah Arendt and her reading of politics as constituting “spaces of appearance”, spaces where political subjects become visible to each other and where a verbal communication takes place.³⁵ The spectacle can be read as a phase of capitalism that fosters the conditions for a space of appearance to emerge.

Primarily in “Notes on Gesture,” Agamben delineates a complex political “theatre” through which he problematizes (doubles) today’s communication, writing of a gestural language that becomes political in the occurrence of its impediment.³⁶ Agamben produces a shift from a political stage made of actors using words, to a political stage of gesturing bodies. And yet this is often still a theatre for a politics made by human beings and for human beings.

Painting, sculpture, architecture, and all the arts, including theatre, have both incited and regulated emotions and their expressions for centuries, and particularly so in Europe since the 15th Century. Important in this respect was the development of the representation of the human figure in the arts, promoted through a new patronage of European bankers at the genesis of modern capitalism. The human figure and the expression of its affections become the subject of technically complex representations. These techniques become highly refined especially in Catholic countries under the counter-reformation, where the representation of human and divine figures more evidently takes up the function of inciting and regulating human emotions.

The diffusion of devotional images from the 16th Century onwards seems to have a parallel with the proliferation of images in the 20th Century, in the way the homologation produced through its affective models increases, and emotions, gestures, movements of the body are increasingly activated, so as to be better controlled. From oil on canvas and sculptures to photography, cinema, TV, digital media and “contemporary art” in all its manifestations, the development of these visual techniques continues to organize emotions and gestures, and to manage something like a social theatre of life, a “world as a stage”.³⁷

³⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, 1958, pp 199-211.

³⁶ Agamben, “Notes on Gesture”, in *Means without End*, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, pp 49-62.

³⁷ To use the title of a Tate Modern exhibition “bringing the realm of performance into dialogue with gallery-based work.” *The World as a Stage*, Tate Modern, 24 October 2007 – 1 January 2008.

I could also say that my attempt of thinking politics and the theatrical together comes from the personal difficulties I have always had participating in social contexts, whether appearing and talking in public. It could be said that this was also a way of looking for a different understanding of political action, for an action different from that of Hannah Arendt, based on verbal communication and collective presence. The form of this problem is repetition: an obsession with myself as a subject tired of being a subject, shying away from people and situations. The possibility I saw from the beginning in using Debord's spectacle to read today's capitalism and its impact on our lives was a liberating one: what we still perceive as an injunction to act in a specific way as subjects, as a constriction to comply with certain norms in relations with each other, is marked by a fundamental emptiness; it is just empty theatre that we find ourselves performing, and indifferent (but to whom or to what?) is the representation that we subsequently provide. From this indifference, from this "liberated" identity, we gain something like a freedom to act otherwise. This is what can be appealing in Agamben's reading, via Debord's society of the spectacle, of the contemporary emptiness of identities, categories and contents.³⁸ "Great, I shouldn't worry so much, I shouldn't get paranoid, it's just a theatre, no one really cares, I do my performance and go home, it's not a big deal." And yet, despite this sense of "liberation", it is still an individual performance that you are required to do...

Is the achievement of this emptiness, even if only in philosophical terms, enough to produce a liberation allowing for different forms of life to emerge? The answer is no: to state a complete emptiness might fit the framework of Agamben's messianism, but it reduces the understanding of the complexity of our conditions, of our restraints and our possibilities (and might make some believe that the anxieties of performing in public will soon disappear by themselves...).

The "advantage" of living as part of a society of the spectacle is that we all are forced to appear, to speak, to perform, we have to expose ourselves, we have to become public. But is this really the case? Is this the case for everybody? What is the nature of this enforcement? Is this compulsion to appear similar to a desire, or is it rather, an imposition from the outside, a form of control and subjection? And if a compulsion to appear is something that capitalism produces today, how can we turn this isolating kind

³⁸ See for instance Agamben, *The Coming Community*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993, also discussed later on.

of appearance (see further down the section on *Big Brother*) into a form of political appearance, into an activism? Is it really a matter of a “small displacement”, from spectacular appearance to revolutionary appearance? What is the nature of this “small”: is it a matter of size, a measurement of efforts?

These interrogations open up another series of questions, related to activism as a practice of “doubling”, as sketched out already in the introduction. Let’s return briefly to this doubling, which, together and sometimes in relation with the image of a theatre, is insistently running throughout the thesis. In a section of *The Coming Community* Agamben describes the coming of the revolution (Agamben, quoting Benjamin, talks of the coming of the Messiah) as taking place through a “tiny displacement”: everything will move just a bit, almost imperceptibly, but at the same time everything will change.³⁹ *Détournement* is read in this chapter as a form of doubling, of almost imperceptibly changing what is already in place. This reading is useful to accompany the passage of what is usually understood as an artistic procedure to something like a revolutionary technique. The problem is that this form of “doubling” risks becoming a reductive common denominator in the course of the thesis. Not that it does: to say this is to point to the problem of submitting everything to a form of reproducibility that lies at the heart of every model, format or technique. It is to remind us, from the beginning, that what makes this doubling important here is its implication in the “micro”, a micropolitics as understood by Deleuze, Guattari, Foucault: the micro of a molecular revolution. It is not an unnoticeable repetition then, but a movement that has to do with our bodies, their relation with different territories, with the cosmos, the relation with subjectivity and its production, the creation of different sensibilities, the reconfiguration of institutions, the experimentation of different ways of living together.

Constructed situations as *derive*

In Agamben’s essay on the *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle*, written as a preface to the Italian edition of Debord’s book, there is a section titled “Situation” in which Agamben focuses his attention on the constructed situation of Debord and the

³⁹ Agamben, “Halos”, in *The Coming Community*, *op. cit.*, pp 53-58.

Situationists.⁴⁰ In these few paragraphs, rather than discussing examples of situationist practices as the title appears to suggest, Agamben introduces the idea of constructed situation through cases that at first glance have little to do with Debord and the Situationist International.

Nietzsche's eternal return, described as a practice of the performing self, and the *commedia dell'arte* as a form of partly improvised theatre, are connected with the constructed situation through a series of resemblances, and appear to be given prominence here in order to highlight the theatrical nature of the constructed situation as interpreted by Agamben.

Agamben's gathering of these three different forms of "theatre" allows him to register an intertwining of the two poles of "art and life", "truth and fiction", "nature and artifice", a register which continually recurs in his attempt to create a condition of "potentiality".⁴¹ Before approaching the relations Agamben weaves across these cases, I will introduce a specific form of constructed situation, the *dérive*: an urban practice of "drifting" initiated by Debord and his friends in the 50's.

A "*dérive*", in its more basic definition, is intended as a drifting around the city. I would like to start here with a different example of situationist *dérive*, a *derive* in the form of a book, *Memoires*, created by Debord and Asger Jorn, where maps of Paris and London are cut into pieces and reassembled together with other images, words, shapes, colours, lines.⁴² These maps, with their combination of fragments of urban representations, debris of spectacular imagery, and shapes on the verge of chance creation, could be conceived as constructed situations in themselves.

If we turn to an essay like "Theory of the Derive" the term "chance" appears continuously, but only in order for the Situationists to do without it.⁴³ When describing *dérive*, the Situationists are preoccupied with distinguishing it from previous practices of wandering around the city, where the wandering usually constitutes an experience of

⁴⁰ Agamben, "Marginal Notes on Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle" in *Means without Ends : Notes on Politics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, pp 73-90.

⁴¹ For a definition of this concept see Agamben, "On Potentiality" in *Potentialities*, Stanford University Press, 2000, pp 177-184.

⁴² Guy Debord and Asger Jorn, *Memoires*, Edition Situation International, 1959.

⁴³ Debord, "Theory of Derive" in Ken Knabb ed., *Situationist International Anthology*, Berkeley, Calif., Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006

personal pleasure and marvel for the walking subject, who abandons himself to the unexplored seductions of the city: “*dérive* entails playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects; which completely distinguishes it from the classical notions of the journey and the stroll”.⁴⁴

To mark the difference from these experiments, the Situationist International frames the practice of *dérive* inside the psychogeographical project: the quasi-scientific nature of this project, and the role of the *dérive* within it, is repeatedly stated. The goal of the operation is not an enhanced form of pleasure afforded by the subject, but the induced emergence of a set of affections which redefine both subjectivity and the urban territory.

In the SI’s words, we have two elements at stake, a “terrain” and an “emotional disorientation”: “it must not be forgotten that these two aspects of the *dérive* overlap in many ways so that it is impossible to isolate one of them in a pure state”.⁴⁵ In this sense *dérive* is not just a situation, in which the wanderer finds or puts himself; it is constructed, the experiment is partly set up and prepared in advance, and takes part in a wider project whose limits are somehow uncertain.

The following definition of *dérive* is already ambiguous: its sense of openness implies a sort of bareness of its participants and an abandoning of usual motives and activities; and yet at the same time such action is predicated upon an explicit denial of chance: “In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. The element of chance is less determinant than one might think...”.⁴⁶

As the name itself suggests, these situations are partly constructed, predetermined, and partly not. We can define this other aspect of *dérive* as, if not chance, the suspension of an end, an action without a final purpose or a set of rules. *Dérive* is a wandering; in order to achieve the overall aim of creating, walk after walk, a psychogeographical city, the walking subjects have to dislodge themselves from the horizon of that very purpose – of any other purpose whatsoever. They have *just* to walk, to “live”, walking, moving,

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50

exposed to “life”, to a “passion of love”, as one of the situationist maps indicates in its title.⁴⁷ Life and passion, life-settings and their passionate intensification, are the elements at play in a *dérive*, as the “Report on the Construction of Situations” suggests when it defines a constructed situation as “the concrete construction of temporary settings of life and their transformation into a higher, passionate nature”.⁴⁸

Dérive is therefore not an aimless wandering through the city in search of new or lost pre-spectacular emotions; if it is partly “constructed”, this is in the sense that the participants follow a set of found or self-given rules: the route along which drifting unfolds is somehow predetermined, even when it appears to be accidentally chosen. Instead of following the rules of the spectacular city, with its functional trajectories, the quickest and easiest way to go from A to B, a different set of rules is adopted. As in the case mentioned by Debord of a friend wandering “through the Harz region of Germany while blindly following the directions of a map of London”⁴⁹, a rule is transplanted from another context. *Dérive* is not freedom from rule: one set of rules replaces another, without the replacement being asserted in opposition to the existing configuration.

The result of the encounter with a set of rules that come from somewhere else is partly unforeseen, the rules are applied not to achieve a prefigured result. These rules could be seen as part of a wider strategy, but they have a temporary use after which they will be discarded. There is a superposition of two texts which cease to coincide perfectly: the city and a system of representation which is not its own, the urban territory and a set of rules, or lines, or measurements which possibly – that is, contingently – resemble the “ordinary” one, but at the same time disturb the urban territory and the life of its inhabitants.

A beautiful example of urban interventions through the application of borrowed or partly invented devices comes, tangentially to the Situationist International, from George Perec. To quote a passage of Perec’s *Species of Spaces* can be useful to mark

⁴⁷ Guy Debord and Asger Jorn, “Psychogeographic Guide of Paris: discours sur les passions de l’amour”, 1956, screen printed map.

⁴⁸ Guy Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations” in Tom McDonough ed., *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁴⁹ Guy Debord, “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography” in Ken Knabb ed., *Situationist International Anthology*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

the differences with the Situationists in the use they make of the urban fabric. From the section “The Street”, part 3, “Practical Exercises”:

“Note down what you can see, anything worthy of note going on. Do you know how to see what’s worthy of note? Is there anything that strikes you?

Nothing strikes you. You don’t know how to see.

You must set about it more slowly, almost stupidly. Force yourself to note down what is most obvious, most common, most colourless.

[...]

Carry on

Until the scene becomes improbable

Until you have the impression, for the briefest moments, that you are in a strange town or, better still, until you can no longer understand what is happening or is not happening, until the whole place becomes strange, and you no longer even know that this is what is called a town, a street, buildings, pavements...”⁵⁰

The psychogeographical project is based on the idea of building a counter-city, a double of the city, mapping the emotions that have emerged in the course of different *dérives*. Somewhat differently, Perec is proposing a way of measuring, looking and experiencing the various elements of which the city is composed; through an extreme closeness to the examined data and a carefully staged repetition of the exercise, this method provokes a blurring of the categories through which the city is ordinarily organized (city, street, palace, pavement...). This blurring allows for a certain kind of invisibility to come forth, for something like an “infra-ordinary” state to emerge out of the spectacle that tends to colonize our lives.

⁵⁰ Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and other pieces*, London, Penguin Books, 1997, pp. 50 and 53, and, from the section “The Town”, part 3, p 62: “There is nothing inhuman in a town, unless is our humanity.”

Detoured cities

A situation gets constructed in the sense that its staging is somehow constructed, the urban platform where the participants “perform” results from a process of fragmentation and assemblage. The most popular visualization of this fragmentation is probably *Naked City*, where portions of a cut up map of Paris are connected with red arrows. The city is doubled, dismembered and recomposed in a fragmented state, through various discrete vectors that produce a relation between otherwise disconnected localities.

Detoured city, the platform across which the walk takes place, is manipulated and transformed as the process unfolds, through the application of systems of rules; *dérive* after *dérive* trace affective lines on the urban soil, shaping again and again ambiances of passion. This re-doubled city is constructed using the material offered by the spectacular city itself, through an urban practice of *détournement*. It is not the invention of an imagined city, a utopia, but the reorganizing of an existent one. In this perspective, Constant’s models of situationist cities can be seen not as utopian but as yet other elements in the process of transforming the city.

The psychogeographic project aims at a doubling of the existent city, and through it the city of the spectacle is crucially rendered something other than a mere object of analysis or critique.

To give a sense of the “transformation” at stake with this “doubling” of the *detoured* city, we could turn to Agamben’s writing of Benjamin’s messianic parable of the perfect world: “The Hassidim tell a story about the world to come that says everything will be just as it is here. Just as our room is now, so it will be in the world to come; where our baby sleeps now, there too it will sleep in the other world. And the clothes we wear in this world, those too we will wear there. Everything will be as it is now, just a little different.”⁵¹

The messianic parable tells of the “coming” world as the coming *city* of god. As with the situationist city, there is all too little utopia in this “city” if utopia is a future place located somewhere else. The coming city is already *this* city, and it is coming in *this* (“messianic”) time; what provokes its transformation (a term Agamben never uses) is a

⁵¹ “Halos” in Agamben, *The Coming Community*, *op. cit.*, p 53.

“small displacement” that is irreducible to either “real circumstances” or a supposed state of things in themselves (architecture and urbanism in the situationist city, a different disposition of urban elements...).

The small displacement that makes of the city something that is “coming,” is an “otherwise”, an “inessential supplement”, “an accidental element”, the “unravelling and indetermination of the limits” of individuality, it is “something like a trembling”. It is a *dérive*, a *detoured city*, an inessential perambulation along the same streets. Not the construction of a new city, but a different conjunction produced between various urban areas, a performing otherwise of the same places, leaving realigned every contour: of streets, buildings, people.

This small displacement, says Agamben, is a “confusive act”.⁵² It is a *confusive* and not a *conclusive* act. Even if in Agamben the “messianic” conveys a sense of the last, the final, the ultimate, something like a confusion replaces here a conclusion. The *confusive* differs from the *conclusive*, but there is a material proximity amongst the two. The confusive might be the spectacle after it becomes ruins, the performance, written, walked or filmic, of its collapse. For Agamben no less than Debord, the contemporary condition has to be pushed to the limits of its exhaustion, to the point of catastrophe even. “The being that has reached its ends, that has consumed all of its possibilities, thus receives as a gift a supplemental possibility.”⁵³

In Agamben’s words we could find the echo of Deleuze on Beckett: exhaustion takes place beyond all tiredness, it implies a different modality, an “act” that has exhausted all possibilities. Just as the body exhausts every possible gesture on stage, so the walker exhausts every possible street to be taken, and thus the very possibility of choosing one street rather than the other.

“The realization of the possible always precedes through exclusion, because it presupposes preferences and goals that vary, always replacing the preceding ones. In the end, it is these variations, these substitutions, all these exclusive disjunctions (daytime/nighttime, going out/staying in...) that are tiring. Exhaustion is something

⁵² A “fusional act”, in the English translation, but this expression does not render well the Italian “confusivo”.

⁵³ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, *op. cit.*, p 56

entirely different: one combines the set of variables of a situation, on the condition that one renounce any order of preference, any organization in relation to a goal, any signification. The goal is no longer to go out or stay in and one no longer makes use of day and nights. One no longer realizes, even though one accomplishes something. Shoes one stays; slippers one goes out. Yet one does not fall into the undifferentiated, or into the famous unity of contradictories, nor is one passive: one remains active, but for nothing. One was tired of something but one is exhausted of nothing.”⁵⁴

I place here Deleuze/Beckett beside Agamben/Benjamin/Debord to highlight the theatrical aspect of both “exhaustion” and “small displacements” as *dérive* and *détournement*. In each case, albeit in different ways, there is a repetition that avoids an excluding preference, either with or against (holy city or city of evil, good or bad, for or against the spectacle); it evades the organization of aims (the situationist city as a final result to achieve), it escapes significant forms (a “situationist” form of life completed with a determinate content).

But if we look at the situationist urban practice in its theorization, we have to register the distance between the teleological intention of the situationist project – the struggle against life’s alienation (to some extent perceivable in Agamben as well) – and Deleuze/Beckett, for whom action has no purpose at all (it is an acting “for nothing”).

Passionate cities

The two terms composing the portmanteau “psychogeography” could be read as referring to both the actors and the stage of a constructed situation, the urban territory and its inhabitants. The first term can be related to a psychic dimension of psychogeography, to subjectivity, affections. The importance of affections in the psychogeographical project is indicated by the proliferating dissemination of “emotions”, “passion”, “pleasure” and “desires” in the situationist texts on *dérive* and constructed situation.⁵⁵ The “Report on the Construction of Situations” defines *dérive* as “the practice of a passionate uprooting through the hurried change of the environments”,

⁵⁴ Deleuze, “The Exhausted”, in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, London, Verso, 1998, p. 153

⁵⁵ The recurrent definition of psychogeography is translated in Guy Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations” (cit.), as “study of the exact laws and precise effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, acting directly on the affective department of individuals.” p. 45.

and one of its purposes as being an intervention in “historical evolution of emotions like friendship and love”.⁵⁶

The reference to a psyche indicates that psychogeography deals with affections rather than affects.⁵⁷ Affections have a role in the doubling of a city, in that the psychogeographical project aims at remapping the city according to emotions developed through *dérives*. More than questioning a psychological subject, the Situationists aim to recuperate a subject from its spectacular alienation, or to create a new subject beyond the spectacle by the stimulation of its emotions. And yet it is important not to neglect the crucial role of affections and emotions in constructed situations.

The “Report on the Construction of Situations” talks about a “passionate uprooting”, the emergence of affective forces in an urban context, through the displacement of a constructed situation: “what is important to us is neither our individual psychological structures nor the explanation of their formation, but their possible application in the construction of a situation”. The psychogeographic proposal is to “apply” feelings, to make use of them.⁵⁸

The situationist city emerges as a series of ambiances of “passion”, from a conjunction of different areas, different actors, and different streets. “Passion” could be seen as what fosters the “undetermining of limits” of the two principal elements of psychogeography: the *dérive*’s “participants” and the urban space. A transformation takes place as a small displacement, a transformation of the city together with a transformation of subjectivity, presiding over new urban forms and new forms of life.

But rather than transformation we should perhaps speak here of change, differentiating the two terms: transformation would be change that did not originate with a subject (with its *psyche*) nor culminate in an object (the city as a *geographical* place), whilst change is a changing into something: another city, another man, a better city, a better man.

⁵⁶ Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations”, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁵⁷ For a distinction between affects and affections see Deleuze and Guattari, “Affects, Percepts, Concepts” in *What is Philosophy?*, Columbia University Press, 1994, pp 163-200. This distinction will be discussed later on.

⁵⁸ Situationist International, “Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation”, in *Situationist International Anthology*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

The practice of constructing situations, whether of *dérive and détournement*, have been retaken, employed and transformed throughout half a century, and still have a significant influence today within aesthetic and activist contexts.⁵⁹

Instead of broaching cases directly inspired by situationist practice, I will use cases that are not usually seen as situationist in themselves and which are not derived directly from a situationist practice. This is a methodological choice that will be used throughout the dissertation: instead of defining a field for the practice of Debord, Bataille, Walser, instead of specifying a line of descent, each chapter will unfold through cases that at first sight might have little or nothing to do with the “subject” discussed. *Mujeres Creando* and a conversation across balconies will reappear throughout the whole dissertation, engaging with different contexts: this is also a way of eroding the specificity of a case as a model, of undoing its objectification. And... and... and... And this... and that... and that... This multiplication of something that is held together by the structure and the limits of a chapter undermines the tendency to fixity of a model. The “model” is presented as intrinsically different from itself, so that it is taken up always on the basis of its further proliferation. What (else) can emerge from a situationist practice today (and tomorrow)?

With an almost opposite gesture, it might be useful to provisionally summarize some of the characteristics of the situationist “model” encountered so far:

- A hybridisation of organization and chance, an intertwining of active interventions and improvisation.
- The character of an exercise, loosely related to a wider project and a broader strategy.
- The replacement of an oppositional critique with a form of repetition, with a practical use of the same material to be criticised, resulting in a disruption of the original term.

⁵⁹ From Steven Willats to Reclaim the Streets, to mention an artist and an activist collective from the UK. For a history of the influence of the Situationist International see, Sadie Plant’s *The Most Radical Gesture : The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age*, London, Routledge, 1992, or Greil Marcus’ *Lipstick Traces : A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1990.

- The fragmentation of this material, the temporary use of a different set of rules as a mode of disruption.

- The uncertain nature of the constructed situation: its achievements are difficult to measure, their effects are unstable, and never conclusive.

2 Re-encounters

After introducing constructed situation and the situationist *dérive*, I return to the encounters staged in the introduction, in order to write them again in the context of this first chapter.

Activism, a conversation across balconies

A few housewives chat across balconies, there is something like a constructed situation in place, with a staging and someone who acts. But the housewives did not plan to make use of their balconies in a specific way, the performance is not part of a wider strategy or plan of action, there is nothing premeditated, the housewives find themselves on the balconies, leaving the domestic interior behind.

An almost motionless *dérive*, at stake here is a redeployment of pre-existing materials – the architecture of the house, the balconies – through a conversation that carries across a space which is neither inside nor properly outside the house, a space in between.

The balconies provide the stage for a re-presentation. Some housewives suspend momentarily their domestic duties, stealing away crumbs of time. They remain a group of housewives, if you like, and their conversation could be a typical conversation amongst housewives, but it would not be the same if taking place in a living room. Its content may be similar, but across balconies the conversation becomes scattered and fragmented, together with the arrangement of the space, the housewives with their duties, the time of their daily routine, their conversation. A banal conversation amongst a group of probably bored, middle class housewives, an almost empty and meaningless conversation, a talking for the sake of talking, barely saying anything, exchanging recipes, lamenting backaches, the individuation of theatrical subjects gets undone.

Despite my efforts to reconcile this conversation with a constructed situation, certain differences remain. The situation is constructed across the balconies without overarching intention, in the service of neither a strategic cause nor purposive ends. The question resurfaces: has anything changed, is anything changing? Is such a conversation, repeated again, likely to provoke a transformation, give rise to a “psychogeographical” housing block? Is it going to affect subjectivity?

The model of the constructed situation could be useful to begin reading again such a conversation which is apparently devoid of any “political” connotations. But this conversation is not political in itself, in the features composing it or the content that lends itself to description. It does not become a model for an everyday activism as the one described in Wikipedia. The conversation across balconies does not quite fit into Debord’s constructed situation either. Hence, it will reappear, asking to be restaged in different ways. Here emerges the “political” of this conversation: it never becomes agreeable, never entirely understood, never entirely reducible to a determinant discursive field. It keeps returning, echoing again. It might reemerge in different contexts. Activism is not the action of the housewives, their conversation as a political act. There is no subject as a group of housewives, nor object transmitted in the act of their conversing. This conversation is not engaged in the conveyance of meaning, in itself or as an example, rather, it is a re-presentation of the dispersion and proliferation of such meaning.

Activism, Mujeres Creando

A bride wanders in the streets of La Paz dragging her wedding gown, pushing her wedding cake on a wheeled tray. A bride as a *mujer creando*, a woman constructing, creating (*creando*) a situation, dressed as a bride, wearing a theatrical costume, inhabiting her identity for the length of a walk. She talks with other women on the streets, in the market, on the pavements. “I hate men”... “I hate men”... “I hate men”... is what every woman says, I hate men because they are lazy, I hate men because they exploit women, I hate men because they have the power and exploit us, I hate men because they have beaten me... The bride doesn’t say much, at the most she asks “why?” She walks and walks, and looks more and more tired, her costume loosened, she

carries on walking, whilst the other women talk and talk. In her *dérive*, her drifting, the luminescence of her dress, of the cake, is provoking something like a fervour, she is the wandering catalyst of a dramatization. The wedding cake she is pushing looks more and more in a state of ruin, eaten bit by bit by passers-by, angry women, smiling boys. The bride is now exhausted, she has exhausted herself as a bride.

What precisely is being changed here, what would be the subject of change? Is it the interviewed women? Is it the various passers-by, the people of La Paz? Is it the bride herself, or the spectators of this video, or myself writing? And who is the participant here, who is the activist? There is a sense of an activation of a public, an activation of ardour in the public of a street, an activation which is not usually the concern of a *dérive*, for which the difference between an active “us” and a receiving “them” is not necessarily in place. To read the drifting of *Mujeres Creando* as a situationist *dérive* induces a shift from the format of the street theatre to a situation where the distinction between activating actors and activated public begins to get confused. The constructed situation was already conceived as an expansion, an overcoming of modern theatre: “The construction of situations begins on the other side of the modern collapse of the idea of the theatre”... The public as spectator is increasingly replaced by actors, actors whose fundamental attribute is that they “live”: “The situation is thus made to be lived by its constructors. The role of the ‘public’, if not passive at least a walk-on, must ever diminish, while the share of those who cannot be called actors but, in a new meaning of the term, ‘livers’, will increase.” In a constructed situation there is a *staging*, but one that pays no heed to the distinction between theatre hall and reality. Everyone is a “liver”: someone who, rather than living *as* an actor, actively, or as a spectator, passively, “just lives”.

To live and to act, if for the Situationist International to live is in opposition to the acting we have to perform every day, authentic life on one side and artificial acting on the other, to *just* live becomes a doubling of acting, it is not opposed to it, no more authentic or less artificial. But this is also to live as a *viveur*, to live a life with a “dubious morality”, as Debord says.⁶⁰ It is living a life without morality, without everything that makes a life something more than *just* a life.

⁶⁰ “Report on the Construction of Situations”, *op. cit.*, p. 47, here “livers” translates *viveurs*; a note of the editor says: “theatrical pun. Typically, the word means ‘rake’ or ‘playboy’, and was thus commonly linked with the dubious morality of the theatrical world; here, Debord assigns it a new meaning that recalls its roots in *vivre*, to live.” p. 50.

The bride approaches a church, we hear the Mendelssohn motif, a badly performed, degraded version of the wedding theme. She goes towards the entrance, unsure, she slowly climbs the steps, staggering, people stare at her... she changes her mind, goes back down the stairs and carries on walking on the street.

3 Constructed situation as composition of “art and life”

Agamben’s politics “at the right height”

In the section “Situation” of “Marginal Notes on *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle*”, Agamben addresses constructed situation in the context of what he calls “a politics that is finally adequate to its tasks”.⁶¹ This politics “*all’altezza*”, an “adequate” politics – literally “at the right height” – is defined as the “point of indifference between life and art, where *both* undergo a decisive metamorphosis *simultaneously*”.⁶²

The couple “art and life”, crossing the avant-garde movements of the 20th Century, passes through the Situationist International, which brings these terms to the point of indistinction (*indistinzione*), and thereby engenders a politics “adequate to its tasks”. An interpenetration of art and life, where the synthesis of a dialectic is suspended by a “point of indifference”, permeates the whole section of this essay: from the “constructed situation” (as the formula itself indicates, art as construction and situation as life), to the eternal return and the *commedia dell’arte* (these being genealogical precursors of the former).

The identification of two poles submitted to a dialectic process with no ends is a procedure often used by Agamben, as a way of re-doubling oppositions, for the formation of a condition of “potentiality”. If the two terms of an opposition change, according to different contexts, different cases and different texts invoked, the mechanism nevertheless remains the same: the two poles become “indistinct” without

⁶¹ Agamben, *Means without Ends*, *op. cit.*, p 78.

⁶² Agamben stresses here “both” and “simultaneously” himself. “Indifference” translates here the term *indistinzione*, which is a neologism; it would be better to translate *indistinzione* with indistinction, which seems to indicate, more precisely than “indifference”, an impossibility of distinguishing two elements. *Indistinzione* is a substantivation of *indistinto*, indistinct, something difficult or impossible to distinguish.

having formed a superior unity. In such a way Agamben re-doubles conventional oppositions in the absence of a given teleological end, in this case the couple “art and life”.

Yet a certain problem runs through Agamben’s methodology here, a problem indicated by the “right height” Agamben wants to achieve for his politics. Agamben looks for a sort of balance between a term and its opposition. The sense of this balance is already in the idea of a “politics adequate to its task”, a politics at the right height, where the height of its task is level with itself. For Agamben “construction” has to find a balance with “situation”, a “right” balance between the two opposites of art, construction, organization on one side, and life, situation, chance, the unexpected on the other. It is this balance which becomes the most problematic “end” for a philosophy that is supposed to proceed without a teleology.⁶³

A sort of matrix for every suspension of binary opposition in Agamben could be identified in what he often calls “potentiality”, a term indicating the inextricability of *potenza* and *atto*. Potentiality could be seen as both the matrix and the destination of all dialectic processes in Agamben. The politics “adequate to its tasks” Agamben refers to in this passage, could be defined as a politics of potentiality, a politics where, as *The Coming Community* tells, “good and evil” are both emptied and balanced in a field of polar tensions.⁶⁴

“Potentiality” has become a key term for the discussion of Agamben’s philosophy especially in the Anglo-American context, partially through a collection of essays titled *Potentialities*. Potentiality is often a translation of *potenza*, but the term has not a fixed equivalent in Agamben, where *potenza* is translated in different ways according to the context.⁶⁵

63 As he does here with art and life, Agamben often recuperates traditional dichotomies in order to operate his peculiar dialectic. Sometimes it seems as if the indistinction is just declared rather than performed, whilst the opposition ends up being reinforced. This is one of the criticisms Derrida directs to Agamben, see for instance Jacques Derrida, *Rogues : Two Essays on Reason*, Stanford University Press, 2005, p. 24.

64 In English there is just one word for both *potenza* and *potere*, *pouvoir* and *puissance*. The word *potenza* in Agamben is sometimes translated with “power”, sometimes with “potentiality”.

65 The title of the collection of essays *Potentiality* has been retranslated into *La potenza del pensiero*, the *potenza* of thought.

When reading Agamben, instead of applying systematically the device of a balancing “potentiality” as a right middle between a positive and a negative, it would be useful to analyse case by case the process by which a specific field of tensions is constructed, starting here with the binary “art and life”, so that, instead of increasing the rigidity of this oppositional device, we could register what may escape from Agamben’s polarization.

“Art and life”: form-of-life and forms of life

The term “life” recurs in Agamben with insistence, intersecting with a variety of distinct philosophical projects: life conceived around the distinction between zoe and bios as can be found in Aristotle, life as thought, as *Potenza del pensiero*, taken from Hannah Arendt, life as bios in Foucault’s writings on biopower and biopolitics, developed in Italy by post-operaists (Negri, Virno, Lazzarato...) and other thinkers like Roberto Esposito.

It is primarily in *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life* that Agamben, drawing on Foucault’s biopolitics, as the introduction of the book states, elaborates a theory where “bare life” is intended as life exposed as such, in its bareness, separated from its possible forms. It could be said that bare life stands for the isolated pole of the couple “art and life”, as pure biological life segregated from “art”, from the numerous forms in which life could be shaped, constructed, organized. In *Homo Sacer* bare life functions at the core of sovereignty; the book is an analysis of the sovereign operation that constitutes homo sacer, depriving it from the possibility of constructing its forms of life.⁶⁶

In some other places, Agamben *doubles* bare life with a “form-of-life”, intended as “a life that cannot be separated from its form”, a life in which it is never possible to isolate something like a bare life.⁶⁷ We could read “form-of-life” as an equivalent of “art-and-life”, where both art and its forms are on the same level of a polarity. Form-of-life could be seen as a sort of redeemed double of “bare life”. The possibility of a construction of different forms of life is replaced by potentiality: not a possibility that will end up in

⁶⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer : Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, 1998.

⁶⁷ Giorgio Agamben “Form-of-Life” in *Means without Ends*, *op. cit.*, p 4.

different forms, but a suspension where bare life, life itself, will not be reduced to a specific form with its specific characterizations. It will remain a naked life, a potentiality that never develops into something else.

This is the argument of *Homo Sacer*: bare life has been always the hidden core of sovereign political power, and finally today, a today situated after the Holocaust, this has become apparent. There can be no return, we cannot protect ourselves with the presumption of having or creating identities and determinations for ourselves, for our life. But this exposition of bare life, more recently manifested in Tiananmen, Timisoara, Guantanamo, or in the migrant detention centres around the world and in the border agencies at the airports, offers the possibility of rethinking politics differently, of thinking a politics as not protective of human rights or of any other determination of what human would be, a politics not driven by this or that goal.

Agamben's "form-of-life" gives an indication of the profound difference between Agamben's and Foucault's projects, despite Agamben's affirmation that *Homo Sacer* consists in a sort of continuation of what Foucault left unexplored.⁶⁸ In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben builds a teleological history of sovereign power through which the latter's structure is gradually exposed; a history culminating and ending in our times, a history the possibility of which Foucault would not have dreamt in his worst nightmares. In *The Archeology of Knowledge* Foucault talks about "The Formation of Concepts" and about a "preconceptual level" that would be in contrast to the idea of a secret history of a concept that gradually manifests itself: "The preconceptual level that we have uncovered refers neither to a horizon of ideality nor to an empirical genesis of abstractions. On the one hand, it is not a horizon of ideality, placed, discovered, or established by a founding gesture – and one that is so original that it eludes all chronological insertion; it is not an inexhaustible a priori at the confines of history, set back both because it eludes all beginning, all genetic restitution, and because it could never be contemporary with itself in an explicit totality."⁶⁹ History for Foucault is preconceptual, in the sense that it cannot be organized around a specific concept.

Agamben's doubling of bare life, following a teleological direction, takes the form of a redemption, reducing Foucault's practice of a life as a work of art, with its openness

⁶⁸ In *Homo Sacer*'s introduction, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, London, Routledge, 2002, pp. 68-69.

towards possibility and experimentation, to a neutral indistinction of “art and life”, a “form-of-life” that absorbs every possible form of life, every different organization of living. This reduction coincides in Agamben with a removal of “ends”, in the sense of a removal of actualizations of potentialities. For Agamben, every form has been exhausted today, and what is left is a last possibility beyond every possibility.

This exhaustion is rather different from Deleuze’s: “one is exhausted before being born, before realizing itself, or realizing anything at all”, exhaustion in Deleuze does not come at the end of a temporal progression.⁷⁰ For Foucault as well, if there is something like an exhaustion, this would never follow a consequential temporality: looking at the Greeks is not a way of going back to the origin of Western thought (to Aristotle and his distinction between bios and zoe), it is a way of exploring a mode of “subjectivation”, a mode of constructing life “as a work of art”, offering a “case” as a form of life that, with all its problems and limits, could be taken up and experimented with again. By submitting everything to an ontology of potentiality, Agamben ends up flattening the fissures, the folds of possibility, that Foucault would open.⁷¹

In Agamben’s pages on Debord and constructed situations, guided by this “point of indistinction”, the difference between art and life is both surpassed and kept suspended in its emptiness. “Art and life” becomes the polarity that gathers together the experiments of the constructed situation, the eternal return, and the *commedia dell’arte* – the three cases presented here by Agamben. The constellation “art and life” on the one hand presides over a pole of creation, artifice, construction, and on the other a pole of mere life untouched by human intervention. In their intertwining, human artifice, human creation (art), and a “creative” force with no origin (life), undergo a permutation, a “metamorphosis” that leaves them indistinguishable. Agamben, through the Situationists, doubles “art and life” so as to transcend their opposition, but at the same time maintaining the tension of their polarity. Constructed situations, amongst whose

⁷⁰ Deleuze, “The Exhausted”, *op. cit.*, p152.

⁷¹ Foucault “The Return of Morality” (1984), in Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live : Interviews 1961-1984*, New York, Semiotext(e), 1996, p. 473. “Classical antiquity never problematized the constitution of the self as a subject; inversely, beginning with Christianity, there is an appropriation of morality through the theory of the subject. Yet a moral experience centred essentially on the subject no longer seems to me satisfactory today. For that very reason a number of questions are raised for us in the very same terms in which they were posed in Antiquity. The search for styles of existence as different as possible from each other appears to me to be one of the points around which contemporary research could be initiated in particular groups in the past.”

number *dérive and détournement* are included, become for Agamben a principal mode for addressing this polarity.

Foucault's recomposition of the binary "art and life" into a practice of "life as a work of art" is less abstract, it is foreign to any sort of teleological perspective. *Dérive and détournement* would become techniques for forms of life that could not be prescribed or labelled, be it "situationist" or anything else. For Foucault, to turn life into a work of art is a process which does not result in a stable and balanced product (a work of art for instance). The formula implies in turn a certain experience of "care", care as art, artifice, construction, the material of which is life itself. The care of the self is the care of the *body* with its pleasures, intensities, affections; a configuration which, as with the ancient Greeks, implies an immanent relation between the soul, the psyche, and the materiality of the body, beyond a modern opposition between body and soul.

I am using here an indication Agamben employs regarding "art and life", to discuss the use the Italian philosopher makes of Foucault's studies of biopolitics and microphysics of power. If, in Foucault, power clasps onto the interstices of the "body", nesting in the folds of "life", it is also in these minute folds that the "art" of resistance can take place. To some extent this "art" is not in the hands of its "creators": it cannot be entirely part of their rational, conscious and intentional planning. A constructed situation is a sort of *strategic abandonment* of control of the self over a situation, it is a mingling of the microphysics of life with action, acting as doing, as art.

The question, then, is how much control should I retain in something like a strategic abandoning? For Agamben there is a merging that has to be balanced, half art and half life. Starting from Agamben's polarity and his reading of constructed situation, I will try to do without the couple art and life throughout the chapter. A strategic abandonment would be something that, like "constructed situation", pulls two opposites together: a strategy, rationally and actively planned, and an abandonment where "the subject" loosens its rational grip, its faculty of making order, distinguishing and individuating, planning and acting consequentially. One of the problem of starting with opposites, as Agamben does, is that it is not easy to undo them, to rid oneself of them. Starting from Agamben's reading of the constructed situation, I will try to disentangle the work of Debord and the SI from the reductions that Agamben's philosophical dispositive of indistinction submit them to. At the same time I will try to emphasize some aspects of

Agamben's reading of Debord and the SI, trying to push them away from the stability Agamben constructs for them.

Dérive and détournement, as compositions of art and life, concern individuals as well as groups. *Dérive* is usually identified as a collective practice. Later on I will treat *détournement* also as an almost "intimate" and self-reflexive exercise Debord employs over his own self, in that peculiar autobiography that is *In girum*, his last film. Whether we talk about a single individual or a group, what is at stake here is a questioning of the integrity of a whole, of wholeness itself, whether individual or collective: if power relations take place in the folds of bodies, it is here, beyond political individual subjects that resistance finds its battlefield. It is primarily towards themselves, as individuals, as a category, that the housewives "resist" on the balconies. They resist their being housewives, each one on her own balcony, with their pots of flowers, their hanging linen, and their whatever babble.

Nihilism, self-destruction, autonomous self-affection

It is possible to understand a constructed situation, says Agamben, only if we locate it historically in its proper place, "after the end and self-destruction of art and after the passage of life to the trial of nihilism".⁷² Self-destruction and nihilism are here the signs of a necessary emptiness that allows for Agamben's consolidation of the binary art and life: art ends, at least in its modern form, by destroying itself, emptying itself of its proper content, whilst life gets philosophically purified through nihilism, which reveals its empty form.

Nihilism and self-destruction could be stretched here from Agamben towards a situationist practice, with its "erosion" of actors in the course of a *dérive*, the fragmentation and recomposition of a *détournement*. The life of Debord could be described as characterised by forces of corrosion, sometimes conducted through theatrical and enduring gestures: Debord himself turns the spectacle into greyness in the very process of defining it, he erodes patiently and inflexibly the society of the spectacle in his writings, in its cinematic transpositions, whilst operating a meticulous disintegration of the Situationist International itself: "our entire program is essentially

⁷² Agamben, *Means without Ends*, op. cit., p 78.

ephemeral. Our situations will be without a future; they will be places where people are constantly coming and going”.⁷³ The implacable expulsions of the members of the Situationist International is not a consequence of the need for a pure and purified nucleus of members, it goes alongside the dissemination performed through the situationist practice: “we will dissolve into people, who live in every instant our project”.⁷⁴ Hence, nihilism and self-destruction become here not historical moments of the emptiness of contents of art, of meanings of life, as Agamben states, but forces “without a future”, the antidote to the fixity of a program. They become “ephemeral” forces, but not in the sense of a limited temporality: as with a constructed situation, they provoke a “constant coming and going”, a dissolution of the (activist) group or the (activist) individual (the SI and Debord) into the dissemination of an “every instant”, beyond the completeness of chronological confinements.

The “self” of self-destruction indicates the autonomy of this force, the autonomy from an oppositional logic of confrontation where something is affecting and something else is affected: here “destruction” is not operated by someone to someone else, it is not a consequence of spectacular capitalism. The housewives are “affected” by capitalism, as everyone else: they engage in a “self-destruction” which differs from a frontal “destruction” of capitalism, it is its autonomous double, a different way of being destroyed, you create your own conditions for your destruction to take place. Perhaps to use the case of the balconies here is pushing things too far: the difference between this self-destruction and the destruction of capitalism might be disproportionate, depending on the context. But if we understand capitalist destruction as a deterritorialization of identity and identitarian relations (I don’t recognize my mother anymore...) it still makes sense to use this example. As Deleuze, reading Foucault, says below, the self affects itself, the force is turned onto itself, it does not partake of an economy of relations in the form of a frontal struggle with Power – “self-destruction” becomes a counter-suicidal force:

“Foucault wonders how he can cross the line, go beyond the play of forces in its turn. Or are we condemned to conversing with Power, irrespective of whether we are wielding it or being subjected to it? [...] Crossing the line of force, going beyond power,

⁷³ Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations”, *op. cit.*, p. 47

⁷⁴ Debord, “The Role of the Situationist International”, in *Internationale Situationniste* #7 (April 1962), IS 7 April 1972, available at <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/role.html> (Situationist International Online)

involves as it were bending force, making it impinge on itself rather than on other forces: a “fold” in Foucault’s terms, force playing on itself. It’s a question of “doubling” the play of forces, of a self-relation that allows us to resist, to elude power, to turn life or death against power.”⁷⁵

The “self” of self-destruction indicates a movement departing from the self and returning to the self, an individual or a collective self. This sort of circularity or repetition, from myself, ourselves, from back and beyond, brings about an autonomous movement, where the “destruction” consists in unleashing this process. “Autonomous” is not against, it is not detached, it is a turning away from the living room, from my self as a housewife, from the function the balconies have been designed for, watering the plants, hanging the linen. It is a way not to care, but also a way to start caring for something else (and someone else, something else, for each other). Autonomy literally means to create your own laws, your own rules of the game, your own construction.

“Autonomy” is chatting across balconies instead of sweeping the floor inside, watching a cooking program on TV, lighting a candle for Tibet. “Autonomy” is a doubling of “individuality”, a turning away from it: I am not autonomous when I am self-sufficient, self-contained, in myself or in a group, I am autonomous because, starting from myself, my balcony, my housing block, the place where I find myself, I return to myself, beyond myself, my roles, my identity, and my separation from everything else. This “destruction” is not necessarily easy to perceive, and it is part of a more complex process that implies a reconstruction as well, where destruction and reconstruction are not alternative or opposed moments, nor goals in themselves, but the movements and struggles through which politics take place. A conversation across balconies is not an event in itself, it is part of a process of re-doubling. I construct something, and I am inevitably not alone in this construction.

Capitalism organizes environments and events to depotentiate life (Big Brother doubling)

It is as if Debord and the Situationists replace the theatre of the spectacle with another kind of theatre, a theatre of the constructed situation. Agamben says: “The Situationists

⁷⁵ Deleuze, “Life as a Work of Art”, in *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1995, p 98.

counteract capitalism - which concretely and deliberately organizes environments and events in order to depotentiate life - with a concrete, although opposite project.” It is the spectacle itself which always already organizes “environments and events”, theatrical representations where our bodies are invited or enforced to perform. The Situationists counteract with an “opposite” project, with the construction of a different staging for different performances. But both capitalism and the SI go further and deeper, it is not just a theatre, it is not all about appearing and performing, it is not all about affects either.

Big Brother could be taken as one of the most popular “spectacular” double of a constructed situation. In Big Brother there is a constructed set where a group of participants act or “live”, act and live, according to a set of agreed rules. Big Brother is a paroxysmic manifestation of everyday spectacular life, and also it sets a paradigm: its model contaminates the urban space and everything else. The streets of the city of London, of every city, become a huge set for a spectacular theatre in which each of us plays his or her role, an individualizing theatre of control. As in Agamben’s reading of its situationist counterpart, in Big Brother as well there is an indistinction, an indifference between “art” and life, life and artifice, construction and situation. Big Brother is “reality TV”, but this reality is highly staged. Nothing in this “environment” is not constructed, not only the conditions of life through a set of rules, but also the characters themselves, already trained on an everyday basis, for the entire length of a life. At the same time this construction encroaches upon something like a bare life, upon what the participants will contribute in terms of performance, the exposition of interpersonal relations, of affections, of connections between bodies. With Big Brother we can talk of something like a bare life also in the sense that the bodies of the participants are totally subjected to the rules of the game, to competition, to the judgement of the spectators who, by watching, have the power to decide the destiny of the participants.

Big Brother differs from a *dérive* or a *détournement*: it is made to be seen, a mediatised event, calling for something like a spectator to look on and exercise a form of control to which he or she is in turn subjected every day to the point of becoming internalised. Also, in Big Brother there is the construction of a stage for the performance of a group of participants who resemble the characters of a whatever sitcom or TV program. In a *dérive* the performers lose their coordinates as inhabitants of a place set up for them,

and the indistinction of living and acting occurs without producing spectacular effects, it does not get capitalized. Big Brother instead is a product of capitalism, it has different functions, it produces subjectivity, and it participates in the axiomatic of capital: at the end of the day it needs to be productive for capital, no matter how indirectly. Big Brother might “double” a constructed situation, but there is a difference that we can define in this capitalist doubling, in this capture, between a deterritorialization without axioms and an axiomatic deterritorialization: the latter is in the service of ends, the axioms and ends of capital itself.

Seeing social life as always artificial, a masquerade, thinking that we are always somehow on stage, might give us the strength, from the spectacle towards something else, to embark in a *dérive* which is not only urban, a *dérive* that puts in danger first of all the reassurance of our subjective identity, I am like this and that, I feel this and that, I desire this and that... The shift goes from the spectacular possibility of flexibly changing identities from one to another, to the experiment of practicing a *dérive*, a straying away from identity as such. The difference, once again, lies in the rules of the game: enforced in one case, re-created in the other.

“Life” in Big Brother is accommodated into a perfectly functioning machine which translates it into spectacle, for the fabrication of standard affections and a standardization of the ability of being affected, a transmittable form of life, broadcast in all its minute everyday dispositions, with all its domestic circumstances, twenty-four hours a day.

In a *dérive*, as a drifting identity that drifts away from individuality, we implicate ourselves in a different machine, where life, its affective forces, desires, intensities, is not translated and accommodated for any specific purpose. If with Big Brother there is a translation of life, of a “passion of life”, into affections and sentiments always determined in accordance with their media communicability, in a *dérive* we have a construction which integrates passion, affects and desires into a process which destabilizes the performers, the stage and the rules of the game.

And yet I think that even in a situation like Big Brother, even in the streets of London, something like an unexpected rupture in the setting of the stage could take place. Agamben recognizes in the “taking place of what it wants to overthrow” one of the

strengths of the situationist experiment: the situationist construction places itself on the same ground of the “enemy”, turning the spectacular city into material to create a different city. As Agamben says, “their utopia is, once again, perfectly topical”, everything takes place on the same ground, not in the name of another world elsewhere. But the unexpected ruptures that can happen everywhere, even on a Big Brother stage, cannot remain isolated, they become active ruptures only if somehow (transversally) connected, in the construction of a different urban cartography.

4 Constructed situation as eternal return

In “Marginal Notes on *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle*” Agamben presents Nietzsche's eternal return as an example of constructed situation: “Nothing could give a better idea of a constructed situation, perhaps, than the bare scenography in which Nietzsche, in *The Gay Science*, develops his thought's *experimentum crucis*”.⁷⁶ In a few lines dedicated to the eternal return Agamben sketches the stage in which this experiment takes place. In the English translation this stage is a “bare scenography”, una “misera scenografia”, a wretched (*misera*) scenography: a room, a spider, the moonlight between branches. The staging of a constructed situation is stripped bare, as with a (cinematic) *détournement* of the streets of Paris, its (re)construction looks uncertain, outlined as it is with very few elements. The bareness of the stage invites the “demon”, who comes and asks: “Do you desire this?”. The question pursues the actor, whose body trembles in the wind. As with the streets of Paris, the streets of London, of Turin, there is a theatre, somewhat disordered, out of place, which ceases to correspond to itself.

Nietzsche listens to the demon, he has its force enveloping his body, bursting through it. A theatre is an artifice, but it is also real: when an actor eats an apple on stage, she “really” eats an apple. Theatre is like a constructed situation, it is artificial, that is, constructed, but always involves something like a “reality”, a situation. Eating an apple is then a reductive example of what this reality could be. Reality is something that could in fact be dangerous. When Nietzsche constructs the eternal return, what emerges is a properly “demonic” situation, wherein you are not in control of yourself and your body anymore. And yet, the eternal return is anything but a suicidal experiment.

⁷⁶ Agamben, *Means without Ends*, *op. cit.*, p 78.

At the core of the *experimentum*, as Agamben says, there is a loss of identity. Paris becomes a stage resembling many others, as Nietzsche becomes so many others himself. Nietzsche the performer is here the pivot of the representation: “Yes, I do” means – I do lose my identity in an infinite dispersion of and variation from my self. This variation of the self drags together with it the room, a spider, the moonlight between branches, what remains of the street outside... If the scope of the situationist project was the construction of a new city as a transformation of the same one, for Nietzsche the horizon is the construction of a human being beyond the human. But subjectivity and city get co-implicated, what the eternal return does is to provoke the passage of entire cities through a body which cannot be just human anymore (the eternal returns is geographical, not only temporal).

“Eternal”, perhaps in a literal sense, is also the temporality of the situationist project: with neither beginning nor end, without final target, a relentless struggle without a promised land, the tireless fight of Debord. When the struggle returns “eternally”, we enter another temporality. At first it seems that Nietzsche renounces every change, he desires “this” here and now: himself, this world, innumerable times more. But it is in the return of the *same* that everything changes. Image after image, the spectacle returns, the same and its doubles. There is a sort of bodily “will”, a hustle and bustle, in this seemingly passive acceptance of the same. As with the situationist practice of *détournement*, the eternal return implies a construction. What seems to be a passive welcoming of the demon and its question, is in fact a constructed situation. This becomes something else than present: the eternal return is not an acceptance of the present conditions, but a desiring thought that breaks open passages onto something altogether other.

Eternal return and messianic redemption

It looks like the same stage, the same city, the same actors, but at the same time something else takes place. Agamben says: "what is decisive here is the messianic shift that *integrally* changes the world, leaving it, at the same time, *almost* intact: everything here, in fact, stayed the same, but lost its identity." The notion of the “messianic shift” Agamben refers to is developed in the section “Halos” of *The Coming Community* where the Italian philosopher refers to a Jewish parable narrated by Walter Benjamin, a

parable of the coming of the messianic reign. It could seem strange to have Agamben referencing, even if indirectly, the messianic in relation to Nietzsche and the eternal return, to bring Nietzsche together with Benjamin. This juxtaposition needs an exploration.

The temporality of the messianic, developed in Agamben through Benjamin and St Paul and explicated most fully in *The Time that Remains*,⁷⁷ is often opposed by Agamben to the temporality of the eternal return, or better, more than opposed, the eternal return is often discarded by Agamben as dangerous, and dangerously close to messianic time. It is in his essay on Bartleby where Agamben firmly refuses the eternal return, following the criticism of Benjamin, who compares the eternal return with the futile, punishing exercise of a schoolboy condemned to write the same sentence again and again.⁷⁸ Benjamin instead proposes a notion of the messianic as redemptive, where everything comes twice and forever. In Benjamin there is a return which is definitive, a messianic double, the repetition of a translation that comes once for all.⁷⁹ Agamben follows Benjamin and his idea of redemption and redemptive translation: his writing could be read in the perspective of a redemption of everything that has been written, the redemption of a potentiality hidden in every text.⁸⁰ This is Agamben's philology, his love for language, a redemptive love, characterized by a redemptive task.

Both Benjamin and Agamben look back to what has been written, in order to make use of the keys of the messianic. Through the eternal return Nietzsche does not look over his shoulder, or in any precise direction.⁸¹ And yet in this passage, in this world that changes *integrally* by staying *almost* intact, we find a place in Agamben where Nietzsche and Benjamin overlap, a joining of forces to undermine a temporality that prevents a new world from approaching. In Agamben there is an immanence, a "remaining inside" of the world to come, of the man to come, and an immanence of another time. Benjamin's messianic time (Agamben's use of it), and Nietzsche's eternal return are both, in different ways, *other* times, doubled times, beyond the eschatological time of a fight for a better future, for a better world in the future.

⁷⁷ Compare the Italian title with the English one: *Il tempo che resta* indicates a remains and also a rest, a remainder.

⁷⁸ Agamben, "Bartleby, or on Contingency" in Agamben, *Potentialities*, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

⁷⁹ Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator", in Benjamin, *Illuminations*, London, Pimlico, 1999

⁸⁰ As Daniel Heller-Roazen suggests in the introduction of *Potentialities*. Heller-Roazen, "Editor's Introduction: 'To Read What Was Never Written'", in Agamben, *Potentialities*, *op. cit.*

⁸¹ Benjamin, section IX, on Klee's *Angelus Novus*, of the "Thesis on the Philosophy of History", in *Illuminations*, *op. cit.*, p 249.

Agamben's gesture brings the reign to come, the paradisiacal, from an elsewhere, to the here and now of the contemporary. The reference to redemption is kept, and Agamben's messianism seems to rest in the polarity of a time to come and a time of the now, in the proximity of these two times, the closeness of a paradise on earth that does not appear so different from this one. Once again we could read in Agamben a temperate gesture, a gesture of mediation, rather than the "most radical" one. But messianic time, at least as developed by Agamben in his book on Saint Paul's Epistles, is too complex to be reduced to a matter of polar mechanisms. Still, it could be said that Agamben always avoids anything "radical", or at least anything that appears as such. To borrow one of his messianic terms we could say that Agamben prefers to "deactivate", or to find a middle way between activation and deactivation. The "coming" of this politics is frozen in a suspension, this is Agamben's temporality: a deactivation of time performed in a written suspension. The difference with Nietzsche is that Agamben needs an emptiness for his politics to come, and this emptiness looks like a sanitized one. The quiet end of everything is very different from the return of everything. The returning of everything is violent and destructive, the body cries, weeps, breaks open, but it is life with its forces that comes together with this "mad" body. In Agamben's messianism everything returns as well, everything that has happened and written, but just to reach its messianic condition of potentiality.

Coming time, *détournement* of time

It is important to read Agamben's messianic temporality as an example of resistance to present times, as an "activist" attempt to double received and imposed temporalities. Activism would become a manipulation of space, but also time, a displacement of received and imposed mechanisms for the production of space and time. In a conversation across balconies the configuration of the balconies gets reshaped, the housewives use the balconies in non-prescribed ways, but they also use time in non-prescribed ways, they take time off, they waste their time. The manipulation of a temporality available to us, the creation of different temporalities, becomes urgent. At the same time, at stake here is not only housewives manipulating time and space, on account of their conversation there is also the temporality of a return that is not easily locatable or definable.

A messianic displacement in the context of the eternal return indicates an immanence in Agamben's temporality: it is here already, double of this time and beyond this time, inasmuch as the coming world is this same world we live in, an *almost* the same world. Messianic time, as Agamben explains when reading Saint Paul, is the time of a somehow parallel temporality, it coexists with chronological time, with representational time: "messianic time is not another time with respect to chronology or to eternity, but is the transformation time undergoes positing itself as operational time".⁸² If chronological time registers and organizes historical events onto a line, with operational time everything that has happened becomes capable of producing effects as if it were happening again, but differently.

Agamben defines this temporal transformation as a "process of contraction", as a "grasping" of chronological time. Messianic time is "the operational time that drives chronological time and transforms it from within".⁸³ The messianic is nothing like a temporality that will take place in the future, otherwise it would be subjugated to chronological time, it would be not *another* time. For Agamben the messianic is "coming": a "coming politics", a "coming community", is not a coming in the future, but the coming of an already coming, a coming already here, waiting to be "grasped". It is the coming of an *almost* here: the coming politics comes in the in-between of an about to come, in the non-coincidence of a doubled time with itself.

Hence, messianic is not what will come at the end of times, because the end of times arrives when time ends, and this is the death of time, when there will be no time anymore. Messianic time is the time in between "this" time and the death of time, not another time, but the exposition of time in the face of its death: "not the end of time, but the time of the end... the time that is left between time and its ending".⁸⁴

Messianic time is time exposed to its death, to its destruction, its disintegration, as in the example of Benjamin, of revolutionary time, when the revolutionary actors put on stage the death of time, a theatrical "killing" of the symbols of official time.⁸⁵ Coming time,

⁸² Agamben, "The Time that Is Left" in "Epoche", Volume 7, Issue 1 (Fall 2002), p. 5.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 5. And at p. 12: "While our representation of chronological time, or the time in which we are, separates, divides us from ourselves, and makes us the powerless spectators of ourselves, observing without time the time that runs away from us, messianic time, or operational time, in which we grasp and accomplish, is the time that we are, and for that reason, the only real time, the only time that we have."

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸⁵ Benjamin, section XV of "Thesis on the Philosophy of History", in *Illuminations*, *op. cit.*, p. 253

revolutionary time, this time is “operational”, it operates a transformation of time, it is a “contraction of time”, eventual time. This time is theatrical, operational as performing, “performative”, as Agamben calls it.⁸⁶ Time is operational as theatrical: not, or not just a chronologically received time to which historical action must submit, but, as in the episode narrated by Benjamin, a time manipulated through its staging, a fissured stage for a disjointed time.

Operational time, performative time, theatrical time, it could be the time of a conversation across balconies, the time taken by a group of housewives, holding time across the void of the balconies, the time of a conversation that keeps returning, echoing in time, not once and for all, but uncountable times, as a doubled conversation, an almost the same: a-chronological time of the insignificant event of a conversation across balconies, the time of a non-completion of a conversation, of a conversation exposed to the void.

Chronological time would go together with utopian time, if utopia is another world coming in a future. Agamben’s messianic time is doubling this utopian time, as an *almost* (or counter) utopian time, it is a “coming” time, where in the same gesture present and future collapse into one another. Chronological time is also the time of history, a history of the past, and of its legacy in the present. Agamben’s messianic time doubles this historical time, it is a time of the return, where a philological gesture opens possibilities for a contact with the beloved, with *philos*, “contracting” the chronological distance between now and then.⁸⁷

Recombinant time

If historical time is the time of a chronological legacy, its double could be the time of a legacy as a sending out, the legacy of a legate, a legacy as an invocation, coming from some other time. Chronological time is the time of Debord in the ‘50s, Bataille in the ‘30s, Walser in the ‘20s, and of their relevance today. Its double is the time of a legacy as an invocation coming from somewhere else, the reverberating sound of a conversation, a sending out escaping its origin and its final destination.

⁸⁶Agamben, “The Time that Is Left”, *op. cit.*, p. 5

⁸⁷ To what extent the distance is undermined in Agamben, and to what extent it avoids yet another temporal closure, remains to be discussed.

Chronological time has been the time of capital, it is associated with capitalism, as a time according to which our work has to fit, as an organizing principle of labour, a time optimizing production and the accumulation of capital. In the 15th century in Europe mechanical clocks begin to replace sundials, time becomes more precisely measured. The time of capital is chronological (I work in the office from 9 to 5), but today this temporality seems more complex, not reducible to a merely linear representation (my mind is still working outside office hours, and not just my mind).

Franco Berardi (Bifo), one of the initiators of Radio Alice in Bologna, a participant in the “autonomia” movement in Italy, and a friend of Guattari since his exile in Paris in the late ‘70s, uses the term “recombinant”, taken from biomedicine, to describe capital time as fragmented, as penetrating every instance, every occupiable fragment of our lives. Recombinant time recombines the fragments of our lifetime into something like a flexible and hyper-productive temporality. Discussing time in conjunction with a debate around precarious work and immaterial labour, Bifo emphasizes the necessity for an “activist” construction of everyday temporalities not opposed to but “autonomous” from the temporality of the capital.⁸⁸

In “What Is the Meaning of Autonomy Today” Bifo explains how one of the strongest slogans of the autonomist movement in Italy was “precario e’ bello”, and how precariousness as a desire and a form of autonomy from a regular job lasting a whole life, was exploited by capitalism through a processes of “deregulation”, “flexibilisation” of work, “immaterialization” of production, and through the introduction of electronic technologies. “The global net of info-production has become the subject of the social working process, and the human fabric of the people composing that net has been fragmented, up to its dissolution. There are no more working human beings, but temporal fragments subjected to the process of valorization, atoms of time recombined in the global productive cycle.” [...] “The worker (a mere machine possessing a brain that can be used for a fragment of time) is paid for his punctual performance. The working time is fractalised and cellularised. Cells of time are on sale on the net, and the corporation can buy as many as it needs. The cell phone is the tool that best defines the relationship between the fractal worker and recombinant capital.”⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Franco Berardi (Bifo), *Il sapiente, il mercante, il guerriero*, Roma, DeriveApprodi, 2004.

⁸⁹ Franco Berardi (Bifo), “What Is the Meaning of Autonomy Today”, in republicart.net, 2003
http://www.republicart.net/disc/realpublicspaces/berardi01_en.htm

The time of work, of activity shaped by capital, is still chronological in so far as it is characterized by a before and an after, with a set of aims to reach and a set of starting points that can be placed in a chronological timetable. But at the same time, capital time works through a fragmented and infiltrating temporality which colonizes time well beyond the “office hours”, through a digital and mobile technology which renders us ever available, through a system of precarious employment that recombines the fragments of our working time into a homogeneous system, through the transformation of every experience into an experience usefully put at work, through the penetration of the time of capital into our bodies and our lives, through a microphysics of capital time which traverses our desires and affects, colonizing in turn of our intellect.⁹⁰

Hence, the separation between a messianic time as operational, and a chronological time as representational, as defined above, seems already undermined and reversed by the emergence of time as “recombinant”, a time that is always already “operational” in as much it operates its own fragmentation and re-composition. The distinction to make is between different ways of fragmenting and re-composing time, rather than between old representational and new performative modes, as Agamben seems to suggest. There is a time that is “operational” with respect to a determinate productivity, in the sense of the *opus*, the work that aims for the accumulation of capital, and there is (but this is a time to construct and keep constructing, not a time which “is” there already) an operational time that is otherwise, autonomous from the axioms of capital. In other words, there is something like a temporality of the corporate performance, quantifiable, measurable and always determined with a view to arriving at a pre-determined result, and there is a temporality of a performance (or better several possible temporalities to be created) that breaks with a teleological consequentiality and constructs its own ways of recomposing its fragments.

Recombinant time is like a *detourned* time: the capital time of fragmentation and recomposition can get doubled into its *détournement*, into many different possible temporalities of repetition. This is the difference with Benjamin and Agamben: there is not one final and definite temporality to come, not one untimely temporality, but the proliferation of several *detourned* everyday times. This means that fragmented time is determined by the singularity of each situation, the reconstruction has to be created

⁹⁰ Franco Berardi (Bifo), *Il sapiente, il mercante, il guerriero*, *op. cit.*

collectively, through the encounter of several bodies: something not so far away from a situationist *dérive*, where alienation was countered through the coming together of the city and its inhabitants. This is the question Bifo poses: how can we recompose a time that is fragmenting our lives, a time that is producing separations across our bodies? How can we recompose time ourselves, not to achieve a homogeneity, but to arrive at a time of joy, of a stickiness of our bodies?⁹¹



APPENDIX 1: **Three cases of theatre everywhere**

5 Constructed situation as commedia dell'arte

We return to Agamben's text on constructed situations, to explore the comparison the Italian philosopher makes with the commedia dell'arte. After Nietzsche's eternal return, Agamben chooses another form of theatre to talk of the SI's constructed situation. The commedia dell'arte is a semi-improvised theatre with recurrent stereotyped characters (Arlecchino, Pulcinella, Colombina, Pantalone...), played by actors on the base of a provisional plot. Following Agamben, I have previously defined the situationists practice in terms of counter-strategies. The commedia dell'arte does not counter anything in itself, it is not a counter-theatre, at least in its form. There is nothing the commedia dell'arte struggles with as the Situationists do, there is no resistance in itself, and yet the commedia could be seen as a theatrical double of "society", and as a double of a "human nature", a doubling of human affections like love, jealousy, adultery: a double as the re-presentation of a society, configured around recurring characters and plots.

The commedia dell'arte does not stage something like a counter-society. This is a stereotyped double of society, a society which is already emptied in itself, Agamben would say, already stereotyped before being doubled. Whilst the Situationists with their experiments were actively counter-posing a society of the spectacle, Agamben moves the situationist experience towards a form of theatre which seems to be far away from political critique. In a single gesture he empties the SI's from its object of critique, and

⁹¹ Franco Berardi (Bifo), "What Is the Meaning of Autonomy Today", *op. cit.*

reformulates the alternative between a society of the spectacle and its situationist double, substituting it with a polarity between a society of a *commedia dell'arte*, intended as today's tragicomedy of a stereotyped empty humanity, and, on the other hand, its double in the form of a "coming community", as the same humanity that grasps and suspends its own emptiness. In this polarity the difference between society and its double becomes minimal, but at the same time, the complex and varied situationist arsenal gets flattened.⁹²

In the *commedia dell'arte*, like on the balconies, the housewives appear themselves as characters, with no position to take, apart from that on the balcony, no object of critique to discuss, apart from the heat of a summer in Bolzano, no political intentions and consciousness, or no intentions at all. In the streets of La Paz an exhausted bride as a stereotype of herself drags her costume through the streets, her wandering placing her beyond every plan, every critique, every antagonism already in place. Throughout the performance her willingness and plans are dispersed. The housewives, the activist, the bride, the activist masquerading as bride, my neighbours masquerading as housewives, appear so much like themselves, repeating the same plot with minor variations, that a microscopic non-correspondence between their own stereotype and what they are in the process of acting out is produced. Such a *commedia dell'arte* seems to prefigure Walser's "comedies", their recurrent characters, servants, poets, idlers (mentioned by Agamben in the *Coming Community*), and their repeated "plots" where almost nothing happens, in the reappearance of the street as their stage.

In his reading of the *commedia dell'arte* as a constructed situation Agamben produces once again an "indistinction", an opposition of two terms that then become undistinguishable. First of all we have a "construction", a stereotype, an empty form, the form of a character of the *commedia dell'arte* as the form of the spectacle: the society of the spectacle becomes here the "society" re-presented by the *commedia dell'arte*. The second pole of the indistinction is that of "life", the pole of the actor behind the character, the human being behind the mask. There is again a distinction and a consequent indistinction of art and life as characterising the constructed situation of Agamben: on one side art as artifice, as construction, human work, in the form of a plot and a few characters; on the other life as the unexpected, as the uncontrolled, as an openness onto the unpredictable. Agamben's indistinction aims to keep this uncertain

⁹² Agamben, "Marginal Notes on the Commentaries of the Society of the Spectacle", *op. cit.*

force of life in equilibrium with the directed artifice of a form of life, of what of life is formed, created by us. Behind the mask, there is something like a life, a force that Agamben sometimes defines as negative, and has to be rescued in an equal combination with its opposite force.

In the *commedia dell'arte*, as in a constructed situation, there is both a construction, art as the text of a plot, and a situation, the improvisation of the actors as “life”, as a live improvisation. The plot is fragmented, there are holes and gaps and inaccuracies, only the trace of a plot is in place; the improvising actor has the ease, or unease, of dealing with these gaps, which bleed into the performance. The stage is reduced to almost nothing, the representation takes place on the street, and all the actors have with them is a costume, a mask and a few props. In a *commedia dell'arte* there is an imposition of a recurrent plot, like a set of rules, “instructions meant for the actors”, and at the same time the play of something like a chance, of a performing self, a living self who responds to others, to a situation.

Beside the “rules” of the plot there are the “rules” of a character, Arlecchino, Pulcinella, Colombina: there is a twofold system of overlapping rules, I am who I am, I do what I do, the empty self of an empty actor, and the two systems do not always coincide. Agamben says: “In this situation...”, and the equivalent expression “nella situazione in atto” has a double meaning, the situation is both the constructed situation, the situation “acted”, “in atto”, but it is also, and more immediately in Italian, the present situation, the current situation. Agamben makes therefore a reference to the current situation of a spectacular society where everything is appearance, theatre, and everyone is playing an empty role with an empty identity for an empty plot. Hence, “In this current situation”, Agamben follows with another polarization, “the destruction of the role’s identity goes hand in hand with the destruction of the actor’s identity”: the role is opposed to its actor, and both are today annihilated. Agamben adds, “it is impossible to understand the comic mask if we simply interpret it as an undetermined or depotentiated character”, there is more than just indeterminacy and emptiness in the *commedia dell'arte*, in our society today. There is a possibility for the “depotentiated” to take part in “potentiality”, in a condition where the “I can” remains suspended.

From *commedia dell'arte* to a comedy of gestures

Gesture, in the context of the *commedia dell'arte*, becomes for Agamben a bodily disposition in-between art and life, “a moment of life subtracted from the context of individual biography as well as a moment of art subtracted from the neutrality of aesthetics”. It is the gesture of a life that is not biography, a life that is not reduced to the narration of an individual history, and, on the other side, of an art as something other than aesthetics, as something that is not confined into the abstract limits of an aesthetic field. This is a gesture of indistinction between the construction of a plot, of a character, and the improvisation of the actor, “neither biographic experience, nor impersonal event”, in between the biographical and the impersonal, the personal experience and a general event. As a gesture of potentiality, “indistinguishable mixture of power [potenza] and act”, gesture is “not the actuation of a power [potenza] but the liberation of an ulterior power [potenza]”.⁹³ Agamben calibrates here the mechanism of potentiality according to the example of the *commedia dell'arte*. The *commedia* is both personal and impersonal, it is both *potenza* and actuation, it is art and life, but art and life having lost their respective outlines to a coexistence. Nevertheless, they still remain art and life, something like a polarity that does not allow us to glimpse the consequence of the fading outlines of its fields: everything remains suspended in its place.

Gesture, says Agamben referencing Benjamin and his essay on language, is “subtracted from the powers [potenze] of myth and destiny”: gesture does not convey an established signifying message, it has no legitimizing origin, it is not originated by a myth, and it has no definite aim. It does not move towards an end, towards a destiny. Gesture is “pure praxis”, as Agamben says here, as in the essay “Notes on Gesture”. It is pure acting, an acting of means without ends (praxis). Gesture is the political gesture of a “communication of a communicability”, the very exhibition of communication, bare language exposed as the basis for human politics, pure language as the potentiality of communication, as a half way between communicating something and communicating nothing.⁹⁴

For Agamben it is as if contemporary society, the society of the spectacle, has undergone the loss of its gestures: gestures are empty, human beings have been

⁹³ *Potenza* is misleadingly translated by “power” in the English version.

⁹⁴ Agamben, “Notes on Gesture”, *op. cit.*, p 59.

expropriated of language, of the very possibility for politics to take place, separated from what puts human beings in communication with each other (according to Agamben, after Arendt, after Aristotle...). But Agamben talks about gestures and not words to indicate language and communication: gesture is a visual kind of communication, as to indicate a shift from a spectacular communication to a different type of visual communication. “Because it is clear that the spectacle is language, the power of communication or the linguistic being of man”: the human being has been expropriated by language as communication, a communication that today is empty, the empty language of the media.⁹⁵ Agamben does not aim at recuperating a communication as the rational transmission of meaning, it is in this bare language, in this emptied language of expropriation that the possibility resides for us to gain a pure language, a language of gesture, subtracted from the finality of communication. We do not have to recuperate meaning to communication, what we need to do is to push the spectacular deprivation of all meaning beyond its empty teleology of an infinite succession of images. Agamben talks about “suspension” as a suspension of this teleological false movement, about a “grasping” of our condition.

The spectacle is capitalism extended to the “alienation of language”, the alienation of “the very linguistic or communicative nature of man, of that Logos which a fragment of Heraclitus identified as the Common”.⁹⁶ The commedia dell'arte exposes the emptiness of spectacular gestures. In this exposure, this repetition, this theatrical doubling, from a theatre of the spectacle to a theatre of the commedia dell'arte, language is redeemed from its alienation, it becomes pure language, a language of gestures. A gestural language is a language of the body, but Agamben does not address the body as a medium of gestures, his gestures seem to be detached from everything, they are pure gestures. Agamben is not interested in exploring the affectivity of gestures: the body appears at the beginning of “Notes on Gesture”, but as a sick body, affected by Tourettes syndrome, a body that waits to be cured, to be redeemed. Agamben’s “coming politics” seems to remain attached to a sense of loss, and thus the need for a consequent redemption of the human condition. Gesture seems to be the threshold for a new politics, but if gesture becomes a redemption of loss, this politics is not so new.

⁹⁵ Agamben, “Marginal Notes on the Commentaries of the Society of the Spectacle”, *op. cit.*

⁹⁶ Agamben, “Violence and Hope in the Last Spectacle”, in Libero Andreotti and Xavier Costa Eds., *Situationists. Art, Politics, Urbanism*, Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, ACTAR Barcelona 1996, pp. 78-79.

Spectacular *media* are doubled into a gesture that is a pure *medium*, gestures as medium in themselves, they are not a medium for anything else. Gesture, as Agamben explains, is the “exhibition of a mediality” (“mediality” is another term taken from Benjamin’s essay on language), the making visible of means as such, of means with no ends, pure means; gesture is the exhibition of the “being-in-a-medium of human being”.⁹⁷ Hence, Agamben’s gesture is a gesture that comes after the time when gestures had a meaning, and beyond the present spectacular time when gestures are emptied from meaning: this is the mediality of gesture, the in-between of a polarity of presence and absence.

Gesture, as the “exhibiting of what cannot be said”, becomes a resembling double of the spectacular gesture, it plays on the same ground of its empty visibility, of its exhibition. It is empty as a spectacular gesture (the gaze of the pornstar, the parade of the model), but its emptiness is of a different kind, it is exposed in its “impediment”, the impediment of language, the impediment of a theatrical “gag”, “gesto di non raccapazzarsi nel linguaggio”, gesture of not being able to figure yourself out, to make yourself out in language.⁹⁸ Agamben, doubling the spectacle with another gesture, dwells in an in-between zone, a middle zone, but here, through this theatrical gag, his gesture of mediality seems to start losing its balance, the equilibrium of a right middle.

Agamben opens gesture to the impediment of language. In this “gag”, communication faces the possibility of its own failure, but the gag is performed anyway, in the face of this very failure. Retrospectively, the gesture of not being able to follow the straight line that Tourette has traced on the floor in order to study the walk of his patient, becomes something else than a disease to be cured. We could claim a proximity between the gag of the actor on the everyday stage that closes Agamben’s essay on gestures, and the convulsive walk that opens it.

A consequential reading would see the convulsive body of Tourette as prior to messianic salvation, whilst the body of the actor performing a gag would be the same body that has finally “grasped” his condition: not a body to cure, but a performing body. You willingly place a gag across your mouth, you perform your own condition, you realize that your situation is to be performed again in all its unmasked imperfection, and this is the way you can exercise something like a political agency.

⁹⁷ Agamben, “Notes on Gesture”, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

⁹⁸ *Idib.*, p 59.

A second reading would see already in the convulsive body of Tourette, beyond the alternative between an (un)natural and a performed situation, something like an everyday ballet, a passionate dancing.

Gestures would become a passionate gesture of a communication without communion, a communication that is not directed towards someone else in order to establish a meaningful exchange: “in this state of communication without transparency that is passion, when one doesn’t know what the other’s pleasure is, what the other is, what is happening with the other” (using a definition of passion formulated by Foucault).⁹⁹ Politics would become a communication with its impediments, gestures that do not occupy a shared space of smooth understanding, gestures that dance convulsively.

My own feelings are stereotyped, inducted, I have been instructed how to feel, but the way I am supposed to feel is so close to a degree zero of feeling, that the empty feeling of a performance, the bareness of my life (its nonsense), can possibly turn, to use Agamben’s term, into something like “love” (a-signifying love). This is the “whatever” we find at the beginning of *The Coming Community*, a whatever to which the “masks” of the commedia dell’arte, this “constellation of gestures”, seems to relate: whatever, “qualunque”, but also “qualsivoglia”, *quodlibet*, “as-you-like-it”, “as you desire it” (this sense of Agamben’s “whatever” gets lost in the English translation).¹⁰⁰

In Agamben, “whatever” opens up a community of people to be loved “as such”, as lovable singularities. This is what Agamben seems to suggest, whilst securing something like a pure “belonging”, a “belonging itself”, as an ontological base for his community. Today’s empty belonging, rather than discarded, seems to get purified by Agamben into an ontological condition. Behind Agamben’s “love” there is still a belonging, even if it is without characterizations, or characterized by empty adjectives (red, French, Muslim...).

What turns this commedia dell’arte, this masquerade of feelings, the Big Brother we perform everyday, into “passion”? From Agamben’s “love” to Foucault’s “passion”, we will carry on addressing this question, also beyond a Situationist “passion of love”.

⁹⁹ Foucault, “Passion According to Werner Schroeter”, *op. cit.*, p. 314

¹⁰⁰ Agamben, “Whatever”, in *The Coming Community*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2

Agamben talks of *commedia dell'arte* and sees in it something like an artistic device to double the “theatre” of our society. For Agamben *commedia dell'arte* is a theatre of existent stereotypes that we have to enact, but at the same time is also a theatre of improvisation, a theatre open to the possibility of something else happening. I have just explained how Agamben turns this possibility into potentiality. What Agamben does not explore of the *commedia dell'arte* is the use of the body made by the actors: even when their face is covered by a mask, and perhaps even more so, their bodies gesture and move with an exaggerated expressivity. We could see their masks as a “gag,” and their gesticulation as resembling the convulsive movements of a man affected by Tourette’s syndrome.

Dario Fo and Franca Rame have also taken up the challenge of making *commedia dell'arte* an artistic device to produce political transformations in society, but rather than masks and stereotypes what is central in their *commedia dell'arte* are bodies that move, gesture and speak, or articulate sounds, in exaggerated ways, on the verge of the ridiculous and sometimes the obscene. There is something popular, pagan, physiologically low, in the way the body acts in this theatre, something not far away from the appetites of the working class Pasolini shows in *La Ricotta* (see appendix 1), something that comes from a tradition which is very different from that of a bourgeois theatre. There is something here that Dario Fo relates to class struggle, to the “extraordinary significance of the worker’s communication within the context of class struggle.”¹⁰¹ This is a “communication” that the body can store as a memory, something that can possibly re-emerge, despite a conscious forgetfulness or disinterest, “because peasant culture has remained in the worker, even though today he couldn’t give a damn about singing an *osteria* song, and sings songs from the juke-box and dresses and behaves with a city mentality.”¹⁰²

As an example of this other gesturing body we could take *Morte accidentale di un anarchico*, a play based on real events happened in 1969: the anarchist of the title, who

¹⁰¹ “... how the worker makes a spectacle a ‘spectacle’, in the original sense of the world, out of class struggle, and makes it a means of cultural expression; the use of particular expressions, slogan, noises, sounds, that are expressed in forms of the grotesque and sarcasm; whilstling, dancing to a particular rhythm, breaking up words, inventing rhyming shouts, thumbing the nose at the boss or ‘demolishing’ him.” Dario Fo, “From Retrieving the Past, Exposing the Present (1978)” in Richard Drain Ed., *Twentieth-Century Theatre*, Routledge, 1995, p. 204.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

“accidentally” dies, is Giuseppe Pinelli, accused of bombing a bank and who during his interrogation, fell, or was thrown, from the fourth floor window of a Milan police station.¹⁰³ This play brings a controversial case to the public to be discussed: Fo and Rame often engaged in discussions with the public before and after their plays, so that the plot would change according to those discussions (and once again in relation with class struggle).¹⁰⁴ To this Brechtian attitude of a theatre that talks directly to the people of issues concerning the people, piercing the bourgeois-theatrical fiction of the fourth wall, Fo and Rame graft the commedia dell’arte with a communication which is not just based on narration, on a delivery of messages and ideas, on the formation of a political consciousness, but it also acts through an alteration of the human body, its gestures, its movements. To say that Dario Fo in *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* acts histrionically is not saying enough. There are moments like this: he pretends to lose a glass eye, which squirts out across the stage, then he starts talking an absurd language that is somehow comprehensible for an Italian audience, and perhaps for non-Italians as well. The entire play is traversed by the possibility for a language of bodily disasters, absurdities, indecencies, to interrogate the crime committed by the police around which this broken narration circles. Commedia dell’arte becomes a theatre of cracks and breakages on multiple levels: it cracks the stage as a theatrical box, the correlation between actors and audience cracks in its unidirectional sense; the relationship between actors cracks in their connections as individuals, the identification of yourself with your character cracks provoking a shift from the first person to the third one, and all these cracks are provoked by the ruffled movements and improper sounds of our bodies.



APPENDIX 2: **Radio Alice**

¹⁰³ The play can be watched online. The text has been published in English as Dario Fo, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, Methuen Drama, 1987.

¹⁰⁴ “Another fundamental aspect of this theatre is that it is the result of a debate: it doesn’t rain down vertically on people’s heads. But when it is performed it has already been digested and debated, and has even created conflicts and arguments. This means that the audience is directly involved in the play, modifying it and suggesting changes – the play is part of the audience’s reality. [...] Only in this way can the theatre be part of reality, of class struggle, and within this context take on the role of the function of urging and providing an impetus.” Dario Fo, “From Retrieveing the Past, Exposing the Present (1978)”, *op. cit.*, p 207.

6 Constructed situation from *dérive* to *détournement*: Debord's cinema

The last part of the chapter is dedicated to Debord's cinema as an example of political activism. We move from *dérive* as a model of psychogeographic intervention, to *détournement* as practiced by Debord in his cinematographic works. The starting point of this section is an essay by Agamben on Debord's cinema: in "Difference and Repetition: on Guy Debord's films" the former provides a reading of the latter that will accompany this section, but that I will also counter, trying to release Debord's cinema from the philosophical apparatus of Agamben.¹⁰⁵ Whilst unhooking it from Agamben's potentiality, I will read Debord's cinema through some of the texts Guattari wrote on cinema.

Détournement might be more difficult to read as an activist practice than a *dérive*, especially when it comes to something like *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, the last film Debord made, discussed by Agamben in his essay. In comparison with the situationist *dérive*, Debord's cinema could be perceived as an individual rather than a collective experiment; it seems to lose the horizon of a socio-political programme, and, implying spectators rather than active participants, it could be interpreted as an involution in Debord's political trajectory. This part of the chapter, perhaps indirectly, questions these separations: between individual and collective action, between the "passivity" of spectatorship and the "activity" of action, between Debord's cinema as an individual creation and *dérive* as a collective practice.

***Détournement*: Agamben's bareness, Debord's desertification, Guattari's vertigo of abolition**

To come up with a definition of *détournement* we could start from the dictionary: deviation, diversion, deflection, detour, turning aside, leading astray; and also reversal, cancellation, offsetting, writing off, subtraction, removal, misappropriation. From these two sets of English terms we can get a sense of movement, the shift from an existent position to a deviation that departs from the latter, and also a sense of erasure: the shift implies a becoming less, the loss of a fulfilled coherence, that was possibly never there.

¹⁰⁵ Agamben, "Difference and Repetition: on Guy Debord's films", in Tom McDonough ed., *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, *op. cit.*

Détournement recombines portions of written, visual, and sonic material already available. It could be said that there is no creation anew in a *détournement* in the sense that its components are there already. The fragments used are extrapolated from their context, detached from the “original” framework, detached from the meanings and functions derivable from it. But at the same time the fragments utilized are not entirely disconnected from the system they are taken from, something remains as a reference to the previous arrangement, and it is this that gives a *détournement* its sense of deviation.

Using the remains of something, something else as remains, the recomposition of another unity is averted. Even when *détournement* constitutes a subversion or a parody, it has always lost its object, it is not a parody or a subversion of something, not in an oppositional sense: in its fragmentation *détournement* loses the finality of making a subversion or a parody.

Agamben’s essay on Debord’s cinema invites us to understand *détournement* away from oppositions. With his films Debord provides more than a critique and an analysis of the spectacle. This is something that was offered already in Debord’s writings: the text of *The Society of the Spectacle* doubles into a film, creating something else.

Agamben’s essay is not only an essay on Debord’s cinema, but more widely an essay on Cinema itself, on the ontological status of the image, and also an essay on art, poetry and writing, and on “bareness” as that which results from the “end of representation” in art. For Agamben, representation today, in the age of the spectacle, is devoid of its contents, it does not represent anything, it is empty reproduction in the form of the spectacle. This emptiness of representation can be defined as the “bareness” of the spectacle, as empty forms which are still powerfully working inside a system with its aims and ends, the spectacular system of capital. The “bareness” of the spectacle is impure because it serves capital, it is utilized in a system which still pretends to represent. This impure bareness is the bareness of pornography and advertising, the two examples Agamben provides at the end of the essay. There is nothing behind the images of pornography and advertising, but still these images lead to more empty images, to more pornographic images, to more images of goods, triggering a powerful chain of enslavement. Satisfaction will never be fulfilled, even if it seems always round the corner, because it is inserted in a system that drags the viewing subject along with it. Agamben does not suggest a recuperation of lost contents, he instead proposes a further

“tiny displacement” of the emptiness of representation, to transform the subjected bareness of the spectacle into something like a pure and suspended bareness, into bareness itself.¹⁰⁶

This would be the bareness Agamben reads in Debord’s cinema, a cinema of images liberated from their content, from their slavery to capital, from a cinematographic system driven by ends and aims. There is no oppositional confrontation between spectacular images (pornography, advertising, Hollywood cinema), and Debord’s cinema; there is, in Agamben’s view, a liberation of images, a rescuing, a salvation of images as pure images, images as “imagelessness”, as the possibility of presentation without representation.¹⁰⁷

Agamben reads Debord’s cinema, and with it all “good cinema”, as a “messianic” operation, where images are suspended in the exposure of their bareness, reaching a condition of potentiality; they do not pretend to represent anymore, they are images “without-image”. Debord’s cinema still presents, as adverts or pornography does, beautiful girls, sometimes stripped bare, but the images of those girls are not there anymore in order to make us buy a bra. They are suspended through the removal of the system of finality they were part of.¹⁰⁸

Let’s see how Debord himself understands *détournement*. In “Methods of Detournement” Debord talks about a “generalization” of *détournement*: *détournement* is somehow always already operating, but it becomes a practice that needs to be “systematized” and “generalized”.¹⁰⁹ This is the program Debord puts forward in these instructions, a programmatic generalization of a practice of *détournement*, moving from a “minor *détournement*” of elements “without importance”, for instance *détournement* of “ugly books”, to an “ultra-*détournement*”, applied to everyday life, to lifestyles and gestures, and culminating in the construction of situations, which is the “final aim of our activity”. On one hand the Situationist International proposes a systematization and generalization of a practice of *détournement*, on the other hand this practice is always already at work, as Debord says at the end of the essay: “The methods that we have

¹⁰⁶ *Idib.*

¹⁰⁷ *Idib.*, p. 319.

¹⁰⁸ *Idib.*

¹⁰⁹ Guy Debord and Gil J Wolman, “Methods of Detournement” in Ken Knabb ed., *Situationist International Anthology*, *op. cit.*, 2006.

briefly dealt with here are presented not as our own invention, but as a generally widespread practice which we propose to systematize.”¹¹⁰ This is also a declaration of refusal of authorship, *détournement* has not been conceived by the SI, it is a practice commonly diffused. At the same time the essay operates a systematization of *détournement* in its different forms, a systematization that would support a further generalization and dissemination of the practice.

Debord provides instructions for everybody to use *détournement*. Debord and the SI repeat something which is already in place: what are the differential margins these repetitions offer, and to what extent are these margins already part of another programme, absorbed by it? The generalization of *détournement* as a practice in these “Methods” reminds us more of the spreading of a disease than the consequence of embracing a cause. *Détournement* as a sort of contamination, almost a degeneration, is surfacing when Debord talks about “minor *détournement*”: “The first visible consequences of a widespread use of *détournement*, apart from its intrinsic propaganda powers, will be the revival of a multitude of bad books, and thus the extensive (unintended) participation of their unknown authors; an increasingly extensive transformation of sentences or plastic works that happen to be in fashion; and above all an ease of production far surpassing in quantity, variety and quality the automatic writing that has bored us so much.”¹¹¹ A generalization of *détournement* would therefore result in an anarchic circulation of bad literature, a mobilization of unknown authors, a proliferation beyond hierarchical criteria; nothing would be exempt from this process, and what has been previously defined as bad literature, as something populating the world, is utilized, but not in the name of making “good” literature out of it. “Bad literature”, or “bad” cinema, advertising and comics, are re-configured, undoing a hierarchical system of value.

There is no redemption of bad books and bad authors as a consequence of this generalization, there is *détournement*: a reappearing, a circulation, a mobilization. A “differentiation” takes place, a differentiation of what is fashionable, says Debord, a differentiation of what is available, of what is everywhere. Something like an army is evoked through the generalization of a practice, *détournement* becomes a weapon, but there is no external enemy to fight against because the whole battlefield is covered by

¹¹⁰ *Idib.*, p. 14.

¹¹¹ *Idib.*, p 11.

this same army. There is no bad literature versus good literature, no bad cinema versus good cinema (as Agamben seems to imply in his essay). *Détournement* is a non-selective practice, it does not select according to a rational criteria of values.

Elsewhere Debord provides another important definition of *détournement*, a negative definition: “*détournement* is dominated by the dialectic devaluing-revaluing of the element” and it has to escape this dialectic.¹¹² In Debord’s *détournement* there is no devalued object to be transformed into a revalorized object, there is nothing like a dialectic, nor a balancing between “devaluing” and “revaluing”; no shift occurs from a loss of contents to the redemption of empty forms.

It is Debord himself who exorcises redemption and “revaluing” from *détournement*: “The cheapness of its products is the heavy artillery that breaks through all the Chinese walls of understanding.”¹¹³ Here the enemy to fight against becomes “intelligence”, and *détournement* a weapon to disrupt the work of intelligence. In the sentence by Lautreamont quoted by Debord, “Poetry has to be done by everybody”, Debord reads not a democratization of art, literature, cinema, a democratization of culture, but the ruining of culture as the product of intelligence, the ruining of culture as a separate sphere with its own hierarchy of values.¹¹⁴ With *détournement* there is a dissipation of (good or bad) Culture and Art, a dispersion of the works of intelligence, a ruining double of the contemporary call for the accessibility of contemporary art and culture, for a participation in culture as a defined entity already in its place, for a Culture delimited as a sphere with its perimeters and its structure. Rather than good cinema Debord’s films would be neither good nor bad, they are “anti-cinema”, and they offer an operational model without a work, for a mobilization everyone could perform: a way of “taking it up again from the beginning”.

What Debord brings about with his cinematic *détournement* is a desertification, not as a result, but as something that is already constitutive of cinema. For Agamben this desertification is a bareness, the bareness of montage that Debord makes apparent in his films. According to Agamben, by becoming apparent in these films, montage liberates the image from the enslavement of the infinite teleology of spectacular capitalism. But

¹¹² Guy Debord, “The Role of Godard”, in Ken Knabb ed., *Situationist International Anthology*, *op. cit.*, p. 176

¹¹³ Debord and Wolman, “Methods of Detournement”, *op. cit.*, p 11.

¹¹⁴ Lautreamont is considered by Debord the initiator of the literary *détournement*. *Idib.*, p 11.

in Debord's cinema there is not this sense of a liberation as opposed to an enslavement – there is no redemption. *Détournement* / desertification is always already in place as a productive potential, and for Debord it has to be pushed beyond and against the uses the spectacle makes of it, it has to be pushed further to destroy the axiomatic of the spectacle, the need for capitalism to accumulate capital, its consequentiality of means and ends.

I propose to read Debord's cinema with Guattari rather than Agamben, using Guattari's texts on cinema. Guattari's reading of cinema provides a more complex understanding of the relations between cinema and capitalism: it offers different tools to read Debord's *détournement* of the spectacle. In "The Poor Man's Couch", where the ways for cinema to affect and reshape subjectivity are compared to those of psychoanalysis, Guattari talks about a "vertigo of abolition" of cinema (from bareness to a vertigo): "A machine treats you like a machine, and the essential thing is not what it says, but the sort of vertigo of abolition that the fact of being 'machinized' provides for you."¹¹⁵ Cinema is a machine that functions through disparate elements, not only through images, and not on the basis of an interpersonal and discursive relationship like in a psychoanalytic session: "The [cinematic] codes intertwine without one ever succeeding in dominating the others; one passes, in a continual back and forth, from perceptive codes to denotative, musical, connotative, rhetorical, technological, economic, sociological codes, etc . . ."¹¹⁶ At the core of cinema there is not a montage of images, as for Agamben, but, to use Guattari's terms, an "abstract machine", a desert-machine, a mechanism that allows for multiple "codes" to function at the same time. "Montage" becomes a combination of the variety of these different codes functioning together: "Its montage of asignifying semiotic chains of intensities, movements, and multiplicities fundamentally tends to free it [cinema] from the signifying grid that intervenes only at a second stage, through the filmic syntagmatic that fixes genres, crystallizes characters and behavioural stereotypes homogeneous to the dominant semantic field."¹¹⁷ Genres, characters and stereotypes are a further constructions of cinema that Debord's desertification / *détournement* dismantles.

¹¹⁵ Guattari, "The Poor Man's Couch", in *Chaosophy, op. cit.*, pp 264-265.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 264.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 263.

Cinema implies a “deterritorialization”, a “desubjectivation”, and this is the vertigo of abolition of cinema: “Without the support of the other's existence, subjectivation tends to become hallucinatory; it no longer concentrates on one subject, but explodes on a multiplicity of poles even when it fixes itself on one character. Strictly speaking, it doesn't even concern a subject of enunciation in the usual sense - what is emitted by these poles is not simply a discourse, but intensities of all kinds, constellations of features of faciality, crystallizations of affects . . . It reaches the point where one no longer knows who is speaking or who is who.”¹¹⁸ Through this cinematic abolition subjectivity can be reshaped according to the models provided by capitalism: desire gets invested and re-territorialised into those models, subjectivity reshaped according to capital's values. But at the same time cinema, with its “vertigo of abolition”, with its desert-machine, offers the possibility of a demolition of those models and values: it is a matter of pushing the desertification further. There is no liberation from enslavement, but a destructive struggle waged by Debord through something like “a cinema of combat attacking dominant values in the present state of things”.¹¹⁹ I will come back later to Guattari and a reading of Debord's cinema as a cinema of “abstraction” rather than pure bareness. In the meantime, I will take a (repetitive) series of close looks at Debord's cinema, as a way to take it up again.

To take it up again from the beginning

There is a passage in the essay on Debord's cinema where Agamben talks about Debord's films as “constructed situations”. Agamben underlines here the importance of repetition in these films, and points at the final shot of Debord's last film, where “The End” is substituted with the formula “to be taken up again from the beginning”. Agamben defines Debord's cinema as a constructed situation in as much it is both “unique and repeatable”: this cinema is “constructed”, it is an orchestration of the material it is composed of, a manipulation of found or existing material, and as constructed it is “repeatable” – what can be repeated is the way it is constructed, the modality or technique of construction. At the same time this cinema is “unique” because always different, the mode of construction is the same but the material used is not, and this differing of the material used is on the side of a “situation”. Agamben analyzes

¹¹⁸ *Idib.*, p 264.

¹¹⁹ *Idib.*, p 267.

Debord's cinema through yet another pair of terms, "difference and repetition", which give the title of the English translation of the essay. Agamben's definition usefully indicates the possibility to extrapolate a modality of "action" from Debord's cinema, a modality of "creation" which is loose enough to be "taken up from the beginning".

"Constructed situation" becomes a repeatable model, a *dérive* on the streets repeated as a conversation across balconies. It could be said that part of the "uniqueness" of its repeatability lies in the possible spoiling of the model as model: the model ceases to be a proper model, fixed in its characters. Similarly "repeatable" is Debord's cinema. It is repeatable as a "model", as an operational model that can be repeated by anyone, repeated and spoiled, to the point that it becomes something else.

The repetition of Debord's cinema is also a repetition of the spectacle, a doubling of the spectacle, its *détournement*, as a way of fragmenting available materials to recombine them in a form that contorts their original context and purpose.

Repetition is important in Debord's cinema because it offers itself as a model for organization and disorganization. This cinema as a model, as a practice of doubling, can be repeated again and again, a repetition that differs from Agamben's repetition coming once and for all, as a messianic double. It is a practice of repetition that can be taken up innumerable times in different ways, and in fact it has been taken up again innumerable times (an example will be provided later on, in the section on hijacking). At the same time, this is a practice that takes up the very material that it intends to contrast, so that the opposition with the enemy is troubled: rather than fighting against the enemy we take its own weapons and we use them in different ways. Hence, there are at least two levels for this "taking up again", the first is the repetition of a film that provides a model to be taken up and changed, the second is the repetition that the model itself operates: instead of opposing something we repeat it.

Because *In girum* is the last film Debord made, "to be taken up again" could also mean to start again with cinema, for Debord to rehearse his own cinematographic production, from its beginning: in this last film Debord inserts images from his very first film, *Hurlements en faveur de Sade*. Debord explains this "to be taken up again" in a note to the film: "The verb 'to take up again' has here several joined meanings to be preserved at their utmost. First of all: to read again, or watch again, from the beginning (evoking

the circular structure of the title-palindrome). Then, to do again (the film or the life of the author). And after, to criticize, to correct, to reproach.”¹²⁰ Debord invokes a repetition by himself, and for himself and everyone else, “to be taken up again from the beginning”: the film has not simply to be seen, but to be done again. And to do the film again is also to take up the life of its author again, to do again Debord’s life, and the life of whoever is in the process of doing so. Finally, to be taken up again means “to criticize, to correct, to reproach”: the film opens to its own disruption, through a critique that is a corrosion and the intimation of a collapse.

We go in circle at night and we are consumed by fire

In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni: Agamben talks about the palindrome of this title as “curling back into itself”, and about Debord’s cinema as a two ways cinema, a cinema of a black screen and a white screen.¹²¹ Debord himself, inside the film, describes the palindrome of the title in very different terms, whilst showing images of Paris at night: an empty public garden, the market of Les Halles when it is still dark...“nothing was translating this present with no escape and no rest as the ancient sentence returning entirely on itself, constructed letter after letter as a labyrinth from which it is impossible to get out, in such a way it tunes so perfectly the form and content of its perdition: *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, we go in circle in the night and we are consumed by fire”. What is for Agamben a two ways movement, the back and forth of Debord’s cinema curling on itself, for Debord the palindrome becomes a labyrinth without escape, the wandering of a *dérive* at night in the empty streets of Paris, the restlessness of the consuming fire of passion.

As Debord says at the beginning of the film, he proposes “to substitute the futile adventures narrated by cinema with the examination of an important subject: myself”. This is what the voice over recites, whilst we watch Zorro in the company of a dying man who says: “but before dying can I know who you are?” Zorro sends away the others and takes his mask down. But we don’t see his face, the identity of Debord /

¹²⁰ Debord, “List of the Quotations or Detournements in the Text of the Film “*In Girum...*” in Debord, *Complete Cinematic Works : Scripts, Stills, Documents*, translated and edited by Ken Knabb, Oakland, Calif. ; Edinburgh, AK Press, 2003, p 205.

¹²¹ Agamben, “Difference and Repetition: on Guy Debord’s Films”, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

Zorro does not get revealed in this autobiographical film where Debord presents himself as a *détourned* star.

The last film of Debord seems to have no subject anymore, the subject is not “The Society of the Spectacle”, but “my self”, Debord as a Zorro about to take his mask off. *In girum* is a sort of cinematographic autobiography, where the “my self” of this autobiography, the subject of the film, tends to disappear amongst the different bits and pieces the film puts together: spectacular images, images taken from Hollywood cinema, from newspapers and magazines; but also pictures of Debord himself, and, just in this film, for the first and last time, images filmed on purpose, shots of the outline of Venice taken from a boat. Being an autobiographic film, what is *détourned* here is first of all Debord’s “self”. The subject of the film, whatever this would be, is undergoing a sort of degradation: a degrading spectacle, a degrading Paris, a degrading photograph of a young Debord, a wiped photograph of an old Debord, already difficult to recognize.

The “my self” of Debord, the subject of the film, offers Debord as a warrior, a hero, a Zorro (and to what extent can this identification be serious, or ridiculous?), exposed through an overstatement: “I am a very important subject”. The terminology used in this film is often taken from war treatises, one of the more frequently used authors is Clausewitz: “I am not a philosopher, I am a strategist” says Debord to Agamben.¹²²

The film begins with a strategic counterattack, Debord assaults the bourgeois public who has criticized his preceding films. The battle is also a personal one, Debord attacks his enemies, the viewers, not just with his words, with the sound of his voice, but also with a myriad of fragments of images taken from everywhere: “yes, I boast of making films with everything”.

The hyperbolic presentation of the self as subject of the film, the dramatization of this subject through a war terminology and images of battles (the defeat of General Custer in *Little Big Horn*), is accompanied with the fading away of Debord’s photographic representations, by the disappearing of Debord in his own autobiographic film, in the greyness of its images, and through the tedious sound of his own voiceover. If the spectacle provokes an emptiness, or an abstraction, of all forms from their contents, if it operates a homogenization, this is repeated and exasperated by Debord in his films,

¹²² *Idib.*, p 313.

echoed in the droning voice of Debord himself, together with the fragmentation of the spectacular images. The voice over acts as a way of doubling the spectacular flattening, both mimicking it and messing it up through the engagement in a battle with the gray remains of spectacular images. The voice, together with the images, from carrier of a message becomes a vibration, a desertification of a voice over in its encounter with the visual ruins of the spectacle, the dramatization of a becoming dust of Hollywood, of the city of Paris, of Debord himself. Towards the end of the film Debord states that he himself has contributed to this degrading movement, to a disaster which is the spectacle's disaster, Debord's spectacular disaster: "and what has been of myself in this disastrous wreck, that I find necessary, of which it could be said I have been contributing, because it is surely true that I have dedicated myself to nothing else?"

Debord's disaster is dramatic, it is "consumed by fire", a becoming dust through the fire of passion, through a dramatization which has the flat intensity of a fragmentary greyness and a repetitive voice over. The meaning this voice conveys is hardly audible, its contents are hard to follow, lost in the tedium of a sound which is not perfectly monotonous, it plays on a very few tones of intensity. To the sound technician Debord writes: "The sentences of the commentary have to be taken everywhere at the same height, and possibly the same has to be done inside of every sentence". This quasi-monotony, this vibration, is reinforced by the literary *détournement* of the texts read, which combine different quotations, manipulate textual fragments from different sources, contributing to the dispersing of the voice, of the film, of Debord, of the spectacle.

Debord in his cinematographic autobiography is recounting the "story" of himself, of the Situationist International, of Paris, and in this returning of "everything", everything crumbles, but not in order to end, it does not crumble into nothing: everything is put in motion again through a *détournement*, again and again, taken up from the beginning.

Détournement as hijacking: Dial H.I.S.T.O.R.Y.

Johan Grimonprez's *Dial H.I.S.T.O.R.Y.* is a film on hijacking constructed through *détournement*.¹²³ The term hijacking translates in French as "détournement d'avion".

Dial H.I.S.T.O.R.Y. reconstructs a history of 20th Century hijacking by using rearranged archival materials. The film could be read as an alternative history of hijacking, assembled using the same spectacular footage of a spectacular history of hijacking provided by the media, where hijacking would be equated with terror and terrorism. *Dial H.I.S.T.O.R.Y.* doubles a spectacular history of hijacking, recomposing in a fragmented way the available material on hijacking in the 20th century: the coherence of a TV documentary gets disrupted. The film uses not only the material but also some of the tools of the spectacle in its construction of a history of hijacking: the rhythm of the film is frenetic and the effect is mesmerizing as in an MTV video. But the tools to make a film spectacular are "fragmented" as well, that is *détourned*, diverted, they exceed a proper and coherent use.

It is difficult to establish what *Dial H.I.S.T.O.R.Y.* does or is trying to do. It could be observed that the film does not constitute a very "good" example of cinema, not as good as Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinema*, for example, which also creates a history (of cinema) through a recomposition of its fragments: the orchestration of the fragment in *Histoire(s)* is masterly, the disparate elements are blended together to form a poetic unity (that Agamben admires and uses as an example to explain Debord's cinema).¹²⁴ *Dial H.I.S.T.O.R.Y.* is confused and confusing, there is no clear agenda at stake, the terrain which it stands on is not clearly defined: the film could be read as a celebration of hijacking, as a critical parody of how the mass media represent hijacking.

The film presents hijacking as "funky", using funky music, and footages with young hijackers and beautiful hostesses. There are no ugly Taliban here, attractive images are used to present hijacking. The rhythm of the montage is also striking, combining flashy

¹²³ Johan Grimonprez *Dial H.I.S.T.O.R.Y.*, 1997, commissioned by Documenta X.

¹²⁴ In his essay Agamben tells how close to Debord's cinema *Histoire(s)* comes to be. But Debord hated Godard, precisely because he was emulating Debord's cinema (see *Le gai savoir*, 1969, as an early example) turning its corrosive counter-spectacular *détournement* into a technique at the service of the spectacle: Guy Debord "The Role of Godard" in Ken Knabb ed., *Situationist International Anthology*, op. cit., p. 176. For a reading of *Histoire(s)* as a cinema of redemption see also Rancière, "A Fable without a Moral : Godard, Cinema, (Hi)stoires" in Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables*, New York, Berg, 2006.

and colourful shots taken from adverts and TV, to produce a mesmerizing effect that is rather different from the otherwise mesmerizing torpor of Debord's images and his voice over.

At the same time hijacking is here something else than a funky and romanticised practice: we see images of trickles of bloods wiped up from the floor of an airport, from the back of an airplane seat, images of people shot, mutilated, dying in front of the camera, often accompanied by pop and cheerful songs playing in the background. The film becomes something more than an alternative history of hijacking in the 20th Century: it could be read as a parody of the spectacle, of the way the media spectacularize violence and death: the music is improper, the montage too frantic, the use of spectacular effects excessive. Still, it is difficult to take as a parody the blood wiped off with a cheerful song of the '70s, the use of music and montage is not just exaggerated, it is inappropriate.

Towards the end of the film we see a young hijacker shot by the police. He is dying in front of the camera whilst the cameraman tries to get his last words, almost begs him for something else to be recorded by the camera. The camera records a few more words, gets his last breath, and shoots the boy dying. It could be said that the film provides a critique of the spectacular way of representing hijacking, but if there is something like a critique here, we could talk of criticality, of a critique which is not exercised from a distance, a critique that is a way of using again the same tools and materials of the object to be critiqued. The film inhabits the spectacle as a hijacker inhabits an airplane: this is not a quiet dwelling, the "inhabitation" goes unrestrained, it becomes difficult to understand what we are watching, the situation tends to escape from the control of the hijackers. From criticality to passion, we have something like a passion for the becoming spectacle of violence, for the becoming fashion of terror, for the becoming star of hijackers, it is difficult to trace a line to separate the spectacle from the counter-spectacle.

As in Debord's films, and in Godard's *Histoire(s)*, in *Dial H.I.S.T.O.R.Y.* there is a use of existing material, fragmented and recomposed together, and of a voice over reading literary texts. Adding to that, we have a pop music soundtrack that sometimes creates a disorientating effect, especially when it plays in conjunction with violent and bloody images. If with Debord's cinema we speak of *détournement*, here we could define as

“hijacking” – *détournement d’avion* – the operation of construction employed by Grimonprez. To hijack an airplane is to make an improper use of the plane, and of yourself together with the other passengers: an improper relation amongst people is set up, an improper situation is constructed, improper according to spectacular standards. *Dial H.I.S.T.O.R.Y.* hijacks the spectacular history of hijacking, and at the same it hijacks us, the spectators.

In this film hijacking is not a suicidal practice, the airplane is not used as a means for destruction as it has been more recently, it is used as a means of communication. To hijack an airplane is a way of getting the attention of the media to communicate a call, a way of utilizing the mass media to have a vital issue known and discussed widely. But communication in hijacking is more than just communication of a meaning: it is *affective* communication, the sharing of a dramatic experience. By hijacking a plane we put ourselves in a situation of danger and we force the other passengers into a dangerous situation, a situation that, in different ways, is dangerous for them but for us as well. We are literally all on the same boat / airplane. Hijacking is a way of forcing ourselves to share an experience with someone that we would never meet otherwise. At some point in the film we see a young boy interviewed right after the hijacking of the airplane he was flying in. He is smiling all the time with shiny eyes, full of excitement: “yes, I had a good time... yes, I would do it again...”. Other people are interviewed after a hijacking experience, they often look as if they suddenly had woken up to life. Hijacking is more than a way to obtain something with a blackmail, it is more than a way to force the mass media’s attention onto an issue, more than a way to communicate a message or a slogan: hijacking has to do with the drops of sweat on the brows of the hijackers, the passengers, the crew, which drips across the separation of their roles and identities. The hijackers have often (but not always, as the film shows), real guns, but on the airplane they are in danger as everybody else is. They put themselves on stage and force other people on this same stage where a drama is played out collectively, a drama whose fiction faces death. Hijacking is a forced proximity amongst people, a shared experience of fear and sweat. In these terms *Dial H.I.S.T.O.R.Y.*’s hijacking becomes a case, an example of activism, in its functioning, in its construction and organization, it becomes a model repeatable in different ways, in different circumstances, performed even with a plastic gun or with no guns at all.

In its becoming a case, a model to be modified, *Dial H.I.S.T.O.R.Y.* suggests a temporal displacement. Today, after the collapse of the twin towers in New York, the imposition of a new regime of stricter security measurements, and an intensified manipulation of fear, not as sweating together but as a paranoid affection, the kind of hijacking *Dial H.I.S.T.O.R.Y.* presents seems to come from another planet, from another epoch. But what the film offers is not the example of a practice unfeasible today, it offers a practice as an example urging beyond temporal limitations.

Debord, criticality, abstraction, a passion for the spectacle

One of the valuable contributions Agamben makes in his essay on Debord's cinema, is a reading of Debord's films as something not critically oppositional to the spectacle. The films of Debord are not read by Agamben simply as a critique of the spectacle: Debord's critique is not a critique inasmuch as it is not conducted from an external position that would take the spectacle as its object. Debord is doing more, or something else, than criticizing the spectacle in his films: these are entirely made of spectacular material, and the voice over, rather than just conveying a meaningful critique of the images, something that was already done in Debord's publications, provides also a sonic alteration, a counterpoint crossing the images. In Debord's films there are the same beautiful naked girls dancing for an advert of bras, but the advert is not there anymore, we are left with the beautiful girls, or what remains of them, girls that nonetheless are exposed, still producing something like a seduction. This seduction is not constructed to obtain a specific effect, as a power exercised by the image on the viewer, to turn the viewer into a customer and for us to end up buying a bra: seduction folds onto itself, it loses both cause and effect, it "turns in the void" (*gira a vuoto*), but nonetheless keeps turning and moving. Debord's cinema manipulates from within the seductive (desiring) mechanism of the spectacle, a mechanism that relies on the power of images and on the becoming image of everything to obtain its goals.

Already in Debord's texts the spectacle was not reducible to a mere object of critique, it was the very condition we live in. From Debord's texts to his films something like a critical distance, the distance from the spectacle, gets thin and uncertain. There is a medium that presupposes spectators, not readers, and spectators of spectacular images. Rather than critique, there is at stake something like what Irit Rogoff calls

“criticality”,¹²⁵ a form of critique that operates as a mode of inhabiting its “object”, as a way of occupying a set of lived conditions. In Debord’s cinema, criticality becomes the opportunity of inhabiting differently what we find ourselves embedded in. As Debord himself says, his own strategy is different from a “rational” and oppositional response to the enemy: “The more the rational character of the reply is apparent, the more indistinguishable it becomes from the ordinary spirit of repartee, which similarly uses the opponent’s words against him.”¹²⁶ Criticality has to take up that loss of rational strategy.

Debord occupies the spectacle, he is not inhabiting it, he does not dwell in the spectacle as in a habitude. We could think of Debord as “squatting” the spectacle, occupying the spectacle, hijacking the spectacle. The spectacle is life, a form of life, and life is lived and not inhabited. From criticality to passion: Debord entertains a passionate relation with the spectacle, with its images, its mechanisms. We could read the diminishment of Debord’s critical distance from the spectacle as a different strategy, a strategy of passion that, as such, is somewhat difficult to define as a strategy, because it partly loses its rational calculation. Debord gets physically closer to the spectacle, to spectacular images, so close as to become the star of his last film: his own face, his own body is placed next to the body and faces of the heroes of cinema and comics. Debord gets “passionately” close to them, this is passion and not love, or identification, Debord is not becoming a Hollywood star, he is coupling with the image of the star and the image of the hero, he is taking them from behind in a sort of rite that undermines their power, that exhausts their integrity, together with Debord’s integrity. The fascination they retain reverberates from the ruins of the spectacle. From a pornographic critique we move to a criticality that does without separations, to a passion that makes us copulate with the enemy and everything else around us.

To understand the effects of this viral copulation, beyond critique and criticality, it would be useful to return to Guattari’s understanding of cinema. In “Cinema of Desire” Guattari analyses how desire is produced, managed and utilized by capitalism and through a capitalist use of cinema. “Cinema, television, and the press have become fundamental instruments of forming and imposing a dominant reality and dominant

¹²⁵ See for instance Irit Rogoff, “Studying Visual Culture”, in Nicholas Mirzoeff ed., *The Visual Culture Reader*, London, Routledge, 2002.

¹²⁶ Debord and Wolman, “Methods of Detournement”, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

significations. Beyond being means of communication, of transmitting information, they are instruments of power. They not only handle messages, but, above all, libidinal energy.”¹²⁷ Guattari explains how capitalism manages this libidinal energy by imposing two limits: a “principle of dominant reality” (that’s how things are... and there’s no way to change them) and a “principle of licit pleasure” (that’s the permitted limit of our pleasure... and that’s where we should focus our struggle to liberate ourselves – Guattari implicitly refers to the aspiration of the “liberation movements” of the ‘70s).

“In this way, desiring-production never ceases to be separated from social production. Fantasized desire and the capitalist real which convert desire to ‘useful’ work involve, apparently, two different types of arrangements. In fact, they involve two politics of desire that are absolutely complementary: a politics of reenclosure on the person, the self, the appropriation of the other, hierarchy, exploitation, etc., and a politics of passive acceptance of the world such as it is.”¹²⁸ Desire is triggered and constructed by capitalism and it gets focused, hence controlled and re-directed, on the established limits of our personal pleasure. The mechanisms are the same we observed before: capitalism takes advantage of deterritorializations and desubjectivations, but it has to re-territorialize and subjectify according to its own axioms, it has to reconstitute an artificial self, together with modes of relations between individuals (exploitation, hierarchy, competition, appropriation) that respond to its axiomatic of possession, accumulation, private ownership: “The important thing is that these models [constructed by cinema] always remain compatible with the axiomatic of capital: the object of love should always be an exclusive object participating in the system of private ownership. The fundamental equation is: enjoyment = possession. Individuals are modelled to adapt, like a cog, to the capitalist machine. At the heart of their desire and in the exercise of their pleasure, they have to find private ownership.”¹²⁹

Desire gets restricted through pleasure, in the sense that it gets reduced to personal and interpersonal pleasure, separated from politics, economics, society, and everything else that traverses and composes our lives. Cinema functions in a similar way to capitalism itself: the cinematic machine produces asignification (movements, colours, sounds, rhythms, gestures, speech...), it produces desires, but through its signification

¹²⁷ Guattari, “Cinema of Desire”, in *Chaosmosis, op. cit.*, p 238.

¹²⁸ *Idib.*, p 244-5.

¹²⁹ *Idib.*, p 237.

(characters, genres, plots...) it reinstates subjects, models, values. Cinema reinstates a separation between ourselves as individual (desiring) spectators and a micropolitic that traverses us. As such, cinema is a formidable tool for the production of capitalist subjectivity, but at the same time is a “dangerous” tool for capitalism, insofar as capitalism, relying on deterritorialization, is endangered by this reliance: a cinematic signification gets produced by cinema, but always in a “second moment”, what constitutes cinema is an abstract machine of asignification, that opens up the possibility of destroying capitalism’s models and values. It is this cinematic abstract machine that Debord lets emerge through the desertification of his *détournement*.

Whilst psychoanalysis reduces everything to familiar affairs, cinema always invests desire in the entire social, political, cosmic spectrum: its abstract machine is not selective but expansive, a desert. Asignification does not separate between desire and politics, it ruins the separation between militant cinema on one side and erotic cinema on the other, between a cinematic critique of capitalism and a bunch of naked girls showing their breasts (sexual liberation / buy a new bra). This separation is a product of a (capitalist) cinematic signification. “The real trap is the separation between erotic themes and social themes; all themes are at once social and transsexual. There is no political cinema on the one hand and an erotic cinema on the other. Cinema is political whatever its subject; each time it represents a man, a woman, a child, or an animal, it takes sides in the micro class struggle that concerns the reproduction of models of desire.”¹³⁰ For Guattari it is not a matter of combining erotic cinema with politics, but, through the extensivity of the cinematic abstract machine, of exploding our private and interpersonal desiring activity, relating it with everything else, politics, anti-capital struggles, cosmic life...

Debord makes a political cinema of desire that does not become an “erotic cinema”, nor a militant cinema: because of its ridiculousness it is not categorizable as such. Debord’s *détournement* produces a cinema where asignification infiltrates through the breakages of a fragmented signification. Affects leak through the cracks of what at first sight appears as an intellectual film-essay. But there is a specificity in which asignification erupts in Debord’s films, and especially in *In girum*. Debord’s cinema delivers a direct attack to capitalist values at the level of signification, of discourse, as he does with its books, but there is another, more powerful attack he throws: the embodied images of the

¹³⁰ *Idib.*, p 245-6.

spectacle, with their insignificant production, are dressed by Debord himself in a sort of ridiculous masquerade. The capitalist and spectacular obsession with the cult of the person, with the “private ownership” of myself as the subject / object of libidinal investment, is unconditionally embraced and pushed towards its paroxysm. Camp, drag, Debord as the Queen of Spectacle... this is the obscenity of an immense, exponential and destabilising libidinal investment in the spectacle (a contagious fucking around with the spectacle).

Cinema as ridiculous struggle - *detournement* of the self

La societe du spectacle was originally published in 1967; six years later Debord used the first three chapters of the book to make the film of the same title. Sometimes the filmic images chosen illustrate Debord’s voice over, for instance, footage of Stalin holding a meeting marry with the narrator’s voice referring to Stalin; at times the images of the spectacle seem to visually describe Debord’s theory of the spectacle. More generally, there seems to be a sort of struggle between Debord’s words, their meaning, their sound, and the spectacular images: the images are almost attacked by Debord’s voice, by its monotonous sound and its obsessive meaning, which is rather difficult to follow.

Sound, images and everything composing them, the critique of the spectacle and a fragmented gathering of spectacular images, struggle with each other, producing frictions through their contact, through a rubbing against provided by cinema as a combination of multiple codes, producing vibrations that change in intensity. Debord represents his text on the society of the spectacle setting the spectacle against his own words, staging a battle where the spectacle and the critique of the spectacle are facing each other, occupying the same (cinematographic) space. The film is dedicated to Alice Becker-Ho, partner of Debord for most of his life, co-author with Debord of *Le jeu de la guerre*, a war table-game that appears in *In girum*.¹³¹ Alice appears at the beginning of the film posing like all the other girls taken from adverts and erotic magazines; she reappears later on, mixed up again with the other girls. It seems that in this relation she is taking something from them, she becomes a double of them: she is not identifying

¹³¹ Alice Backer-Ho and Guy Debord, *A Game of War*, Atlas Press, 2007

with them, she appropriates their images, fighting them from within. She is “dragging”, imitating them, as a camp version of a model.

In *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* the friction produced between sound and image gets even more complex. It is more difficult to individuate something like the two opponents of the ongoing battle, to separate images from sounds: gestures, tonalities, vibrations, intensities, rhythms, as “asignifying” cinematographic components, emerge from the film. “When it is exploited by capitalist and bureaucratic socialist powers to mold the collective imaginary, cinema topples over to the side of meaning. Yet, its own effectiveness continues to depend on its presignifying symbolic components as well as its asignifying ones: linkages, internal movements of visual images, colors, sounds, rhythms, gestures, speech, etc.”¹³² What *détournement* destroys is meaning, the meaning produced by cinema exploited by capitalism, spectacular cinema as a tool to mould the collective imaginary according to capitalist values.

In Girum is not or not just a film about the spectacle, a cinematographic version of a theory of the spectacle, it is also a film on Debord, on his own life, his own story, the story of his friends, the story of the SI. The film begins with an attack on the spreading middle class, and from the beginning, despite the monotonous voice over, Debord provides something further exceeding a critique: images are used here, at the beginning of the film, to illustrate Debord’s analysis of a wretched and squalid bourgeoisie... but the result is almost comical, the grinning families portrayed in their beautiful houses and in supermarkets become ridiculous abominations, through the combination of isolated details of their faces with Debord’s verbal attacks.

Entirely constructed as a battlefield, the film begins with this attack on Debord’s enemies, practically the entirety of the western spectacularized world, and ends with apocalyptic images of war and devastation, images, taken from Hollywood movies, of the “disastrous wreck” (real or fictional?), which is “necessary”, and to which Debord has dedicated all his energies, all his “life”. In between the initial attack and the disaster of an end without an “END”, Debord tells his own story and the story of the SI, his own counter-spectacular version of it, using the visual debris of the spectacle. He declares himself as the only famous living person who has refused to take part in the spectacle, who has refused to become an image, spectacle itself. Debord is producing his own

¹³² Guattari, “Cinema of Desire”, in *Chaosmosis, op. cit.*, p 242.

documentary on himself and on his friends, a repetition of the spectacular documentary form, a self-celebration of himself and his virtues in a grandiose way, *détourning* and dramatizing the spectacular celebration of himself as a celebrity.

What seems to be a sort of delirium of omnipotence of Debord is yet another operation of *détournement*; this becomes clear when Debord praises himself whilst showing the comics of a heroic knight, or when he identifies himself with Lacenaire by showing parts of a film where the literate crook utters claims like: “When I was a child I was already more intelligent than the others, and they have never forgiven me for that. What a beautiful youth I had!”, and “I’m not cruel, I’m logical, I have declared war on society”, and also “Have you murdered many people lately, Pierre-Francois? - No sweetheart, look: no trace of blood on my hands, just ink stains”. A faded photograph of a young Debord keeps coming back, together with an image of Debord’s face as an old man, partly erased by an overexposure, in this film which is a practice of subjectivation as *détournement* of the self. The *détournement* of the spectacle goes together with Debord’s own self-celebration, whilst at the same time one more stroke is delivered, his weapons reutilized and refined, for a disastrous wreck that inevitably drags down his own self, Debord together with his enemies, with the entire world, always on the verge of a collapse into the ridiculous.

Debord engages in a process of subjectivation, that of a self at war. The enemy is the spectacle, and the spectacle is everywhere, it is not an individuated enemy, not an enemy as a person or a group of people, it is an enemy without defined identity. The spectacle works in such a way that subjectivity is tightly entangled with it, there is not myself on one side and the spectacle on the other. Spectacle is the process that turns (my) life into commodity, that transforms even the most imperceptible elements of life, desires, affects, intensities, into something “visible”, into something perceptible enough for it to enter the capitalist machine with its assignment of values. So, the enemy is neither just within nor simply outside of myself. Another way of saying this: I am not entirely in control of subjectivation, but the “system” cannot be totally in control of myself either.

The enemy within myself: “I think about myself, as a weak, not very intelligent, hypersensitive person, this is my self, this is how I represent my identity in front of

myself. I look for ways to overcome my weakness, which makes me feel frustrated and depressed. Counselling, meditation, homeopathy... could they be a solution? I would like to work better, faster, maintain concentration... I want to do more, I want to meet interesting people, I want to publish papers and take part in conferences, collaborate with other people in more projects, and the obstacle to all this is myself, the way I am, my own insecurity. It's me, it's my fault, I have to sort out this deficient self..."

The enemy outside myself: "It is because of the 'system', the 'spectacle', 'capitalism', the way academia works that I am depressed, weak, frustrated..." It is still more difficult for me to think in terms of an enemy outside myself. I must have somehow learned to think that I should blame myself for my inadequate functioning into the world.

Debord becomes here a figure that guides us away from this either "inside" or "outside" logic, by reconfiguring war and struggle. The enemy is not (or not entirely) within myself, the war has not to be engaged with my interiority, my inner self. The enemy is not, or better, not only outside myself: to separate myself from everything else is already to surrender to the rules of capitalism. To engage in a war with the spectacle is to play a game, the *game of war*, where I put myself at play, where I can see myself from the outside, playing, engaging in a struggle, without taking refuge in an outside-the-spectacle that does not exist, and without taking refuge inside psychotherapeutic practices that aim to help me make myself a better functioning cog within the 'system'. Debord plays his game of war in order to keep fit, to exercise, to get stronger. He becomes a star, the star that drags cinema towards its ruin, onto the battleground, he uses himself and his own image to fight the spectacle, using the spectacle against itself, using himself against the spectacle and himself. To tell myself how I am, weak, fearful, dull and so on... where does this lead? I'm going to get allies, and I might even try to publish and go to conferences if this becomes part of the war. I want to play this game, to become a warrior, like Debord, not only a strategist, but a warrior, a *Reuber*, a robber, Lacenaire, whose face appears scratched, fading away.

Chapter 2

Pathologies of our times: to be at loss and its doubles (Georges Bataille)

“What I’m saying can only be understood in relation to what I have called the molecular revolution. There is a certain level of desire, violence, and revolt which has become impossible and unbearable in societies such as they have developed at both the technological and social level. Let’s take the example of terrorism: throughout the history of the workers’ movement, there have been armed actions and acts of terrorism. There have been enormous discussions throughout the communist movement to put into perspective and to situate armed action. Nowadays it’s no longer a theoretical problem, but a problem of the collective sensibility as it has been shaped by the State apparatus with its audiovisual tentacles: one doesn’t accept any more the idea of death, the idea of violence, the idea of rupture, or even the idea of the unexpected. A general infantilization now pervades all human relationships. If there’s a strike at the National Electric Company, be careful. A code of ethics for the strike must be drawn up. Confrontation in Bologna? Be careful, a full negotiation must be made. And if one senses an aberrant factor, if there’s a handful of resisters who don’t accept the ethical code, it’s a black hole. [...] Today you can’t desire rupture, you can’t desire revolution, or indeed anything which puts into question the framework and values of contemporary society.” Guattari¹³³

“When dealing with a depression the problem is not to bring the depressed person back to normality, to reintegrate behaviour in the universal standards of normal social language. [...] Depression is based on the hardening of one’s existential refrain, on its obsessive repetition. The depressed person is unable to go out, to leave the repetitive refrain. The goal of the schizoanalyst is to give him/her the possibility of seeing other landscapes, to change focus, to open new paths of imagination.” Bifo¹³⁴

I feel sick. I couldn’t really sleep last night. I spend days and days in this room, trying to write this dissertation, and I just feel more and more sick, I feel I have no energy left. I’m afraid of doing anything, I don’t want to see anyone, I’m scared of going out of this place. I promised a friend to visit her in Venice next week, it should be something like a short holiday, but I’m already appalled by the idea. And this gets much worse whenever an image of what is waiting for me in September assaults me, unwonted: going back to London, start working again... my throat is seized by a contraction. It is like being trapped here, I cannot stand this place, but I cannot leave it either. I still write, sitting on the bed, my shoulder bent on the laptop.

Last night I dreamt of the Virgin Mary with a crown of shining stars on her head. Suddenly she was close to me, so close that I could only see her hands and part of her

¹³³Guattari, “Why Italy?”, in *Soft Subversion*, Semiotext(e), 1996 edition, p. 81.

¹³⁴ Bifo, *The Soul at Work*, Semiotext(e), 2009, p. 216.

dress. But I had the sensation she was laughing at me... she was not the Virgin Mary as she appeared to me at first, her laugh was evil, mocking... After that, darkness. I woke up and I could not sleep anymore. I have not been able to sleep properly for days now, despite the pills I take every evening. My stomach is aching, I had some food hours ago and I still haven't digested. Will I ever finish this PhD? I've opened the window to breathe because there is no air in here, and it's windy outside, but it is a hot and humid wind that makes me suffocate. I go onto the balcony to breathe and I look down, at the empty drying-rack below, a sense of vertigo sizes me.

This chapter deals with the "negative", with what we live and perceive as negative, what our society and culture considers negative. Negative is what threatens us, society, capitalism, it is what puts us in danger, what draws us towards death. How to deal with this negative? How to define it? Is this negative in opposition to a positive, as death opposed to life?

This could be seen as a chapter on therapy. What is therapy? It is a way of facing the negative of our lives, of society, its institutions, and the larger mechanisms that are all tightly connected with us. What is therapy for, is it to get rid of the negative, to reach a state of wellbeing, to get a sound body, to have a right society, and maybe a fair capitalism? Who decides what is sound, right and fair and on what basis? To talk of therapy might lead us to think in terms of "diseases", the negative as disease. Rather than individuating diseases to be cured, this other therapy would deal with bodies and forces, with the configuration of apparatuses (subjects, institutions, systems...) that turn those forces into something "negative".

In the passage above Bifo talks of depression as a contemporary illness: depression can be cured with psychotropic medicines, drugs that quickly erase the symptoms. Or it can be "cured" through schizoanalysis, turning, twisting, doubling depression by producing something that could put desire in motion again, a desire producing conjunctions across bodies and across the subjects, institutions and systems that contribute to that form of suppression of desire.

The whole dissertation would function as a therapeutic process with no end: with no set parameters for health, no end result to be reached and measured against a state of normality of our bodies.

More specifically, the questions addressed will be: how to transform (today) the “negative” into something “political”, as part of a political process? What can become of therapy in its conjunction with politics? How can the political experiences of Georges Bataille contribute to addressing these questions?

“How to cure the Nazi?”, this is a question Bifo poses as the title of one of his books.¹³⁵ A strange question, is the Nazi something that is supposed to be cured? What is Nazism and what is “to cure” here? To cure is not to come back to normality, to a sane body: it is to desire otherwise. To cure the Nazi means to turn our deathly, stiffening and suicidal desire into another kind of (deathly) desire.

Bataille develops a political practice through a passion for the “negative”, through an engagement with that which bourgeois society and capitalism, hence ourselves, consider as negative. Filth, violence, disease, blood, unproductive sex, war, disasters... Bataille’s engagement with the negative encompasses a limitless scale that brings together, sometimes making them clash, the micro faculties of the body and the macro structure of a solar system: of a sun becoming an anus, not through identification, but through a machination of relation, a copulation of this... and this... and this... of what we perceive as far away (micro and macro).

“Negative” is also what modern society has relegated to the margins, what modern western civilization has declared dead, what survives in a deathly state: myth, sacrifice, the sacred, mysticism, magic... From the perspective of capitalism and its culture, all this is “negative” as the unproductive, an “unproductive expenditure”, that which capitalism cannot put at work. This is what gets eliminated, expelled to the margins, covered and suffocated, unless it can be recuperated inside the functioning of the capitalistic machinery. An example: disease is something that has to be cured, eliminated, in order for us, workers, to be productive. At the same time the non-productivity of disease gets recuperated by capitalism through the business of the pharmaceutical industry and the plethora of techniques designed to achieve our psychological and physical wellbeing (well-working-being). This is what Deleuze and

¹³⁵ Bifo, *Come si cura il Nazi*, Ombre Corte, 2009.

Guattari call the “anti-productivity” of capitalism, which capitalism tends today to incorporate, moving it from the margins to its interior.¹³⁶

In the ‘30s, historical Fascism makes use of this “negative” for political purposes, turning it into a Fascist politics, and doing so in spectacular ways. Again: violence, blood, war, disasters, and also myth, sacrifice, the sacred... all these are tools of a Fascist agenda. Fascism constitutes itself as an affective politics, a politics based on desire, and this is the difference with institutional Communism. This explains the “fascination” of the anti-fascist Bataille for Fascism. Fascism hinders the capitalist and bourgeois system of Parliamentary Democracy by making use of what capitalism and bourgeois culture are suppressing, hiding, pushing to the margins. This is Bataille’s political project in the ‘30s, to oppose Fascism by learning from Fascism, by using, differently, the same tools Fascism uses, by unleashing a deathly desire that is *almost* like a Fascist desire. Fascism exploits (a deathly, suicidal) desire. Can we think and practice a politics which is affective without exploiting affects, a politics of desire which does not exploit desire, as Fascism and Capitalism do? This chapter interrogates the various modalities established by Bataille to re-pose the question of fascism again, so as to encounter the negative in a different way from fascism.

What is negative today, for us? Perhaps (as Deleuze and Guattari affirm) this is not something pushed at the margins as it was for Bataille in the period between the two world wars. Filth, violence, disease, blood, unproductive sex, war, disasters... Rather than excluded and covered, the negative today is placed at the core of the capitalist machinery, put to work as never before, but still in a sanitized form. Filth, violence, disease, blood, unproductive sex, war, disasters... to some extent and in some forms they are all commodities today. The negative, the disasters of neoliberalism itself, are sanitized and distanced, seemingly detached from us and our bodies, even when they affect our own bodies. Macro and micro could not be set more apart: on one side the “horrific” spectacle of the TV news, on the other, far away and completely detached, my personal wellbeing supplemented and corrected by paying for medicines, psychologists, yoga teachers, doctors.

This negative demands to be re-thought in the wake of Bataille’s work. By what means, by what system of evaluation or judgment, does a force come to be identified as

¹³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, Continuum, 2004, see especially pp 222-262.

“negative” in the first place? Is a force ever positive or negative in itself? And when a force is deemed negative, what are the subsequent consequences of placing this force under repression, of attempting to diminish this force? We should, with Bataille, learn to listen to these forces, in their almost imperceptible and each time unexpected emergence: what is it that at a certain moment prevents me from breathing, what seizes my chest? And how does this micro-event place itself within a macro-configuration, a global disaster for example? How are these forces repressed, blocked, squeezed and capitalized in our body, in our society, in all kinds of machines? Can we use these forces otherwise, can we use their destructive power to transform us and the world, without succumbing?

This is a chapter doubling the “negative”, a chapter repeating differently what makes us sick, what we consider to be and experience as negative, on account of the standardized norms of our culture and society. In a way there was something similar in the previous chapter, with Debord and a doubling of the spectacle in his last film. The spectacle is the “negative” for Debord, the “enemy”, but Debord doubles the spectacle in such a way to exploit its “beauty”, its power of fascination. With Bataille this operation of repetition of the negative is what informs his entire practice, especially in the years leading up to the end of the second world war. In this period Bataille experiments with new forms of politics, forms alternative to bourgeois Parliamentary Democracy, to official Communism, and to the Fascism incumbent in the ‘30s. Of these three political models, it is the last to which Bataille’s work returns, in an attempt to get near to and repeat this negative in different ways.

But why Bataille today? The “negative” Bataille addresses is also the negative of the “bourgeoisie”, the dominant social class. Bataille actively, practically and violently tries to destroy the values of the bourgeoisie, the values of the dominant culture, of the class allied with capitalism (and allied with fascism). But as a bourgeois himself, it is from himself that Bataille will begin to unfold this process of destruction, a process that therefore touches upon respectability, obedience, a sense of normality, an appreciation of cleanness, rectitude, a communality as sharing a similarity, a being alike, and a rejection of violence and conflicts. This provisional index of behaviours would be one means by which our subjectivity consolidates itself: the positive values ascribed to them and the negative values ascribed to behaviour that departs from them are themselves a principal form of subjectivation.

Bataille offers us a series of tools to begin to undo our subjectivity. No doubt our subjectivity cannot be simply erased, this would equate to something like a suicide, a self-imposed death. Yet throughout his writing a variety of corporeal, affective exercises and experiments provide an experience of a *momentary* destruction of our subjectivity. Bataille gives us something like a training path for our bodies. This training is therapeutic, but not in the sense that it necessarily makes us feel good – the contrary may be true: it may well lead us to experience something to be endured, something neither easy nor pleasurable to undergo.

Today's process of subjectivation is characterized by its great speed. Deleuze and Guattari talk of deterritorialization: the subject as (part of) a "territory" stands to be desubjectified through capitalism itself, and always to capitalism's own ends. Bataille suggests ways to counter this deterritorialization by producing our own version of this process. This is Bataille's activism, to actively take up a process by which we ourselves are undone, and to do this not to the ends of capitalism, but to... no ends whatsoever.

In a way, the index of values I have listed above have arguably ceased to be the dominant modes of subjectivation. Respectability, obedience, a sense of propriety, an appreciation of cleanness, rectitude, communality as being alike, a rejection of conflicts and violence... all this seems to have been destroyed already by capitalism itself, by a savage and violent neoliberalism based on unregulated, violent competitiveness and even outright criminality. Those "good" values are still operating in a number of ways, in the official hypocritical discourse of politicians and NGOs, for example. They are also a constitutive part of a neoliberal subjectivity: they still have a grip on us, they are part of a morality that transfigures the violent anti-productivity at the core of capitalism, and they produce a separation between an instrumentalised neoliberal violence and oppositional attitudes to counter it. It is not only the undoing of these classical values that makes Bataille so contemporary, then, but the doubling, the torsion to which he submits those "bad" values that are increasingly strong in the contemporary neoliberal machinery.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Benjamin Noys, "Shattering the Subject: Georges Bataille and the Limits of Therapy", in *European Journal of Psychotherapy, Counselling and Health*, September 2005; 7 (3): 125-135, p 126. Noys defines Bataille in terms of "untimeliness", and Botting and Wilson as well detect the contemporaneity of Bataille: "Bataille raises the question now considered to define the postmodern condition: 'If there is no longer a great machine from where to speak, how do you call others to action and for what end?' What is

As with the Surrealists, after the second world war Bataille's destructive fury seems to weaken, perhaps because the determinants of bourgeois culture appeared to have exhausted themselves, not least in the form of total war. It was a period of reconstruction, and Bataille too seems to reconstruct, to reconstruct *himself* first and foremost, putting together the fragments of his own theory and practice, configuring them in a recomposed form, taking on the mantle of the post-war public intellectual. Today again it seems that we are living in a time that, in terms of social unrest, appears closer to the European '30s.¹³⁸ In this summer, 2011, London is burning, and burning for real. After the government's violent attacks on the very concept of a public body (schools, university, NHS, pensions, social security benefits of all kind), after months of demonstrations and occupations that *apparently* have had little effect, at least on a macropolitical level, the rage of a working class, of a lumpen proletariat (the social composition of these 2011 riots is complex), that has been reduced to vegetate and rot in (not just economic) misery breaks out.

If we look at the trajectory of Bataille's political experiments, it seems that they somehow "shrink", from the appeal to the masses of Contre-Attaque, a political group founded together with André Breton (October 1935 - May 1936), to the collective of the secret society Acéphale (1936 - 1939), and its academic counterpart of the Collège de Sociologie (1937 - 1939), to the solitary experience of the *Summa Acephalica* (1939 - 1945). This chapter analyzes these experiments not from the perspective of their "shrinking" size, of a progressive withdrawal of Bataille into a politics of the self, but as offering different modalities of mobilization. These different modalities are tightly connected with historical events, but they should not be considered an evolutionary or involitional process, determined by a chronological trajectory. We will consider them as different inflexions of an "affective politics", as part of a political "project", which includes some of Bataille's narrative production.

to be done in a period of wilting democracy, warring capitalism, national crises, a period of insurrectionary energies and Fascist spectres?" from the introduction of *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, 1998, p 6. Later on in this introduction the two authors (embarrassingly) attack Deleuze and Guattari *Anti-Oedipus*, saying that capitalism already incites desire, and Deleuze and Guattari are just complicit of this incitement (pp 14-16). Towards the end of the essay they return to Bataille and to present times: "there is a compelling reasons to suggest that this is becoming more of a Bataillean universe rather than less, though of an unexpected kind." But this is precisely where the "untimely" Bataille and Deleuze and Guattari converge: in their pushing capitalism further, in their strategy of radicalization rather than opposition and resistance.

¹³⁸ But also to the '70s of Radio Alice as the previous chapter suggests.

So far as we know, the only attempt to discuss Bataille in connection with contemporary political practices is found in the work of Gavin Grindon. The beginning of his “Alchemist of the Revolution” could be perfectly used to explain the importance of dealing with Bataille today:

“In recent years there has been a philosophical emphasis on the role of affect in politics, in writing on affective labour, micropolitics, biopolitics, enjoyment or the realm of the sensible. [...] It seems timely now to look back at the meaning of this moment in Bataille’s thought and its early critical claim for the revolutionary potential of affect. [...] His peculiar attempt to marshal the force of affect rather than ideological rationalism for Communist organisation [...] stands, with all its problems, as an important precursor to contemporary attempts to theorise the possible political roles of affect.”¹³⁹

Grindon starts his reading of Bataille from Surrealism and from the Surrealist revolutionary project, and discusses the crucial connection between Bataille, Marxism and Anarchism. He defines Bataille as a “Surrealist-Marxist”, and focuses his reading of Bataille on the “political” writings (*Contre-Attaque* and *College de Sociologie*). To define Bataille’s affective politics, Grindon brilliantly borrows from Marx a definition of Bakunin as an “alchemist of the revolution”, as someone who attempts to provoke the revolution by using unmanageable forces (those of the Lumpenproletariat). But Grindon considers Bataille’s revolutionary project as historically “aborted”, and explains the reasons of this abortion with Bataille’s increased interest in “mystical and asocial experience”.¹⁴⁰

This chapter however will show that Bataille’s “mysticism” is strictly related to his revolutionary “alchemy”. Bataille the sorcerer’s apprentice cannot be separated from the Bataille of an inner experience whose core is “community” and “communication”. And in Bataille the use of “mysticism”, “myth” and the “sacred”, has to be understood as an attempt to liberate the deathly forces of what modern, bourgeois, capitalist society has deemed negative.

¹³⁹ Gavin Grindon, “Alchemist of the Revolution”, *Third Text* Vol. 24, Issue 3, May, 2010, 305–317.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

Beside Grindon's contribution, little has been written recently with a view to producing a confrontation between Bataille's and contemporary political practice. After a "revival" of interest in the 80's, Jean-Luc Nancy's exploration of the political potential of Bataille's "community" and Blanchot's reply, Bataille has ceased to be a point of reference in debates around politics and the political.¹⁴¹ Agamben's *Coming Community* could be placed in relation to Nancy's and Blanchot's texts on community, but Agamben prefers to confront Bataille on the terrain of sovereignty, turning to the latter's systematization of sovereignty in *The Accursed Share*, a text written after the second war (as we will see, the earlier Bataille is dismissed as "ridiculous" by Agamben, too romantic, excessive, and philosophically useless).¹⁴²

By looking superficially at the history of his English language publications, Bataille seems to be mostly appreciated as a writer of eroticism, perversion, transgression.¹⁴³ The general academic tendency is to look at specific parts of Bataille's oeuvre, according to the separation of academic fields of research: anthropologists, for instance, seems to prefer the *Accursed Share* and the essay on General Economy, art historians the texts on Lascaux, and so on.¹⁴⁴ There are cases in which Bataille is discussed as an "activist", but his practices are always evaluated in their historical context in ways that disqualify the possibility of otherwise using those practices today.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ See the rediscovery of Bataille by *October: October 36* (Spring 1985), and also *Formless, a User's Guide*, which is both a catalogue and an exhibition held May 21-August 26, 1996, at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, curated by Yve-Alain Bois, Rosalind Krauss, MIT Press, 1997. Also, Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, University of Minnesota Press, 2004, and Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, Station Hill, 2006. Agamben writes his *Coming Community* right after Blanchot's *Unavowable Community*. He does not mention Bataille, but in the last section he makes a reference to Blanchot, dismissing his community as a negative community, a "simple absence" of conditions of belonging.

¹⁴² Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp 112-5. But Nancy as well tends to use the post-war Bataille. After the second war Bataille attempts a systematization of his thought producing a considerable shift in relation to his previous writings and experiments. Nancy reads in Bataille a continuity and a progression, and concludes that Bataille fails in his attempt to think a community as alternative to both the fascist and the communist community.

¹⁴³ One of the most recent work by Bataille published in English is a collection of erotic prose and fragments titled *Divine Filth*, 2009 (it could be the title of a John Waters' film); a book like *Guilty* has not been republished since 1988.

¹⁴⁴ Bataille's interests exceeded from the beginning any kind of circumscribable field of knowledge. This sense of excess towards scientific disciplines is something that a beautiful exhibition on *Documents* conveyed at the Hayward Gallery, 11 May - 30 July, 2006: *Undercover Surrealism; Picasso, Miro', Masson and the vision of Georges Bataille*. The catalogue of the exhibition is: *Undercover Surrealism. Georges Bataille and Documents*, edited by Dawn Ades and Simon Baker, London, Hayward Gallery, 2006. On the exhibition see Benjamin Noys' review in *Radical Philosophy*, 139 (September/October 2006).

¹⁴⁵ Beside Grindon, it should be mentioned at least Jean-Michel Besnier, "Georges Bataille in the 1930s: A Politics of the Impossible", *Yale French Studies*, No. 78, On Bataille. (1990), pp. 169-180, and the writings of Denis Hollier, for example "On Equivocation. Between Literature and Politics" in *October*, Vol. 55. (Winter, 1990), pp 3-22 (Hollier reads here as "equivocation" what I call Bataille's doubling).

After a discussion of Agamben's reading of Bataille, the chapter analyses some key texts written by Bataille in the '30s and '40s, in order to compare Bataille's formulation of fascism and microfascism with that of Deleuze and Guattari. How can we think and practice an activism that takes as its starting point the "negative" of our lives?

1 Giorgio Agamben tries to neutralize Georges Bataille as his ridiculous "double" [controfigura]: from A to B, Bataille strikes back

In several places Agamben sets himself in confrontation with Bataille, the Bataille of the '30s, of communitarian thought and political experiment. The confrontation is always brief, but recurrent. There is only one essay that Agamben entirely dedicates to Bataille, "Bataille e il paradosso della sovranità", which has not been translated into English, but it served as a basis for a short section on Bataille in *Homo Sacer*.¹⁴⁶ Other short sections on Bataille appear in *Language and Death*, *The Time that Remains*, and in *The Open*.¹⁴⁷

Agamben is always critical of Bataille: I will investigate the reasons for Agamben's rejection of Bataille so as to ascertain what is at stake in this rejection. The two share many concerns, they face similar issues in different ways, but it seems that Agamben needs to keep disqualifying Bataille, to take distance from him. Why?

From a broad theoretical point of view it could be said that both Agamben and Bataille are concerned with Hegelian dialectics. Agamben's philosophy proposes a suspension of dialectical synthesis and the disclosure of a certain equilibrium between the two poles of the binary, held in the tension of their *indistinction*, in a messianic state of potentiality. Bataille too "suspends" the ends of dialectical opposition, but in a violent way: rather than a suspension we have a collapse of binaries, a constant clashing of opposites that are never reconciled. The sun becomes a black hole, a blinding solar anus, a "rotten sun", the source of life on earth treated as a manifestation of expenditure

¹⁴⁶ Agamben, "Bataille e il paradosso della sovranità", in Giorgio Agamben and Jacqueline Risset eds., *Georges Bataille, il politico e il sacro*, Liguori, 1987, pp. 115-9; and the 2nd "Threshold" in *Homo Sacer*, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-5

¹⁴⁷ Agamben, *Language and Death*, University of Minnesota Press, 2006, "Excursus 4", pp 49-53; Agamben, *The Open*, Stanford University Press, 2003, "Acephalous", pp 5-8, Agamben *The Time that Remains*, Stanford University Press, 2005, pp. 122-3.

with no other purpose than to squander energy and light.¹⁴⁸ Mystical experience, the “experience” of Angela da Foligno, becomes an “inner” experience whose final aim, the communion of the mystic with God, is torn apart.¹⁴⁹ The blue of noon collapses onto the earth, reflected in a pool of blood on a pavement.¹⁵⁰ Neither Agamben nor Bataille pursue a solution here, make an appeal to a determinate end, but in comparison with Bataille’s violent overturning, Agamben seems to propose a discreet accommodation of the positive and the negative.

Bataille / Agamben: language, literature, poetry, and their relation with “death” (*Inner Experience* and other works / *Language and Death*); sovereignty and its overcoming (*Inner Experience*, *The Accursed Share* volume 3 / *Homo Sacer*); the revision of the notion of “sacred” (*Inner Experience* and other works / *Homo Sacer*, *Profanations*); “bare life” as a condition from which other forms of life (“form-of-life” in Agamben) can emerge (*Inner Experience*, *The Accursed Share* volume 3 / *Homo Sacer*, *Means without Ends*, “Nudities” in *Nudities*); the impact of images on subjectivity (*Documents*, *Inner Experience* / various essays by Agamben on Warburg and Debord); fascism and Nazism, although approached from different perspectives (*Blue of Noon*, *College de Sociologie / Remnants of Auschwitz*); Christian and Catholic authors, mystics for Bataille (Saint John of the Cross, Angela da Foligno), Paul and the Fathers of the Church for Agamben; the proposal of a “community” beyond community (*Acephale*, *Inner Experience*, *Guilty / The Coming Community*); the role of the animal in an anthropocentric economy and the critique of this economy (*Theory of Religion / The Open*); and the already mentioned attempt to discharge teleology, together with an interest in Hegel (everywhere in Bataille and Agamben, who discusses Hegel especially in *Language and Death*): these are some of the issues and concerns that Bataille and Agamben share.

There is not enough space here to compare the respective ways in which Bataille and Agamben address the issues listed above. In our present context, it is nevertheless useful to consider the different modalities of doubling in Agamben and Bataille, “double” being the mechanisms by which they seek to repeat what is already given so as to leave it transformed. We have previously introduced the section “Halo” of *The Coming*

¹⁴⁸ Bataille, “The Solar Anus”, “Rotten Sun” and “The Notion of Expenditure” in *Visions of Excess*, University of Minnesota Press, 1985, pp. 5-9, pp. 57-8, pp. 116-130.

¹⁴⁹ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, State University of New York Press, 1988, especially Part 1, pp. 3-29.

¹⁵⁰ Bataille, *The blue of noon*, Marion Boyars, 1988, pp. 96-133.

Community where Agamben retells the messianic tale according to which, when the Messiah arrives, everything will stay the same, or almost the same, save for a minute displacement.¹⁵¹ *The Coming Community* itself can be seen as a way of doubling our contemporary conditions, from an individualism that becomes “singularity”, to an indifference that becomes “whatever.” Here and everywhere, Agamben’s doubling as potentiality, as an equilibrium of poles without prospective resolution, appears like a pacifying transposition of opposites. Is there something “bourgeois” here, in this need to pacify everything, to accommodate, to find a balance, in this way of dealing with the “negative”?

Bataille offers a radically different way of doubling which provokes the collapse of every kind of balance between a positive and a negative pole. Most importantly, this collapse implicates the “philosopher” as well, it is not something that Bataille observes, unscathed, from the safety of a philosophical distance. The “displacement” is minimal in Bataille as well, not in the sense of being discrete, but of a claustrophobic proximity where everything, starting from the identity of the writer as writer, the philosopher as philosopher, the activist as activist, is thrown into question.

Different ways of doubling can be individuated in Bataille: a doubling of the experience of Christian mysticism, often using the same vocabulary and techniques of mystics like Angela da Foligno and John of the Cross;¹⁵² the doubling of Hegel and Hegelian dialectics, as Derrida analyses in one of his early essays;¹⁵³ the doubling of Nietzsche, and after Nietzsche his own friends Blanchot and Klossowski, through an impossible proximity on the verge of death itself (the experience of facing “our” death).¹⁵⁴ Bataille, together with his friends of Contre-Attaque, Acephale, College de Sociologie, but also in the period removed from these communitarian experiences, in the “solitude” of his writing during the war, doubles fascism and fascist community. Bataille doubles “community” by thinking a “community without community”, experimenting with the

¹⁵¹ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, *op. cit.*, pp 53-58.

¹⁵² See especially *Inner Experience*, and Angela da Foligno, *Il libro dell'esperienza*, Adelphi, 1992; John of the Cross, *The collected works of St. John of the Cross*, ICS Publications, 1979. In “L’immagine aperta” Didi-Huberman reads Bataille as doubling Christian imagery: the figures he refers to are mainly those of Saint Francis and Saint Catherine of Siena – in Agamben and Risset eds., *Georges Bataille e il sacro*, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-188.

¹⁵³ Derrida, “From Restricted to General Economy”, in *Writing and Difference*, Routledge, 1978.

¹⁵⁴ See numerous texts by Bataille on Nietzsche, Klossowski and Blanchot on Bataille, especially Blanchot, “Friendship”, in *Friendship*, *op. cit.*

headless community of a (theatrical) sacrifice. Bataille doubles sovereignty as *ipseity*, as a sovereignty of the self over itself that provokes a dispersal of the self.

Mysticism, dialectics, Nietzsche and friendship, fascism, community, sovereignty... to list Bataille's interests always implies a reduction of Bataille to something he is not, to something that he was constantly fighting against. To organize Bataille in such a way is impossible. Still, Bataille could teach us something about organization, the impossibility of organization and the organization of the "impossible": affects, desire, intensities... This is the challenge to take up here: can we organize as Bataille does?

I will use Agamben's "Bataille e il paradosso della sovranità" to introduce some important aspects of Bataille's political experiments, whilst at the same time trying to unshackle Bataille from the philosophical device that Agamben insists upon subjecting him to. What follows is a detailed reading of Agamben's essay, and a reading that, incited by this text, repeatedly departs from it. Agamben's essay will dictate the arrangement of the different issues discussed.

Agamben opens his essay on Bataille by narrating his own meeting with Pierre Klossowski in Paris. Klossowski tells Agamben about Walter Benjamin outraged by the research of the College de Sociologie. He imitates Benjamin: "Vous travaillez pour le fascisme!" exclaims Klossowski. Starting from this re-enacted admonition, Agamben asks in turn: "how can we be sure that we are not working for what Benjamin called fascism?"¹⁵⁵

Agamben describes Bataille's community as an alternative to both a communist and a fascist community, as a "negative community": "The communitarian experience implies for Bataille both the impossibility of communism as absolute immanence of human being to a human being, and the ineffectuality of every community of fusion in a collective hypostasis [this second is a brief description of fascist community]. To this idea of community Bataille opposes a negative community, whose possibility opens onto the experience of death. Community as revealed by death does not institute any

¹⁵⁵ Agamben, "Bataille e il paradosso della sovranità", *op. cit.*, p 115.

positive bond amongst subjects, but is rather ordered to their disappearance, to death as what cannot be transformed in a substance or a common work.”¹⁵⁶

We can see already from this first definition of Bataille’s community how Agamben uses a reductive potentiality of black and white to reorganize Bataille in two sides: Bataille “opposes” his community to a fascist community of fusion, Bataille’s negative community is a community of death, and already here appears the “paradox” of the title: there is something like a community in Bataille, but instead of being founded upon something common to each of its members, is founded on their (and thus its) death. In other words, we have the positive of a community that is established on its very disappearance, the positive and the negative together, life and death, possibility and impossibility, the two poles, the two extremes at the same time, and the “antinomic structure that Bataille tried to grasp throughout all his life” (a fantastic and implausible image of a tormented Bataille who spends all his life trying to solve a logical enigma...). This is a rational way of reorganizing Bataille, as the choice of the term “paradox” to define Bataille’s sovereignty also indicates.

But already in Agamben’s definition of fascist community as “fusion” we can see how Bataille’s community functions like a doubling rather than an “opposition”. Through the fascist “fusion” the human being in its integrity, its individuality, is annihilated. It is precisely this fusion as annihilation that interests Bataille. This is an affective annihilation of (bourgeois) individuality, an unbounding provoked through affects. Within the fascist community this annihilation becomes functional, subject to a hierarchical structure, it is reabsorbed into yet another organization. A plurality of individuals becomes a machine of annihilation, combining a desire for annihilation with the rigidity of a hierarchical apparatus. In a fascist community the coherence of the individual is destabilized only to be recomposed into the totality of a deathly machine organized through the constitution of a head.¹⁵⁷

Bataille doubles this fascist fusion with what he calls “death”. His doubling has nothing to do with a paradox of life and death, and at the same time explains Benjamin’s

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p 116, Agamben here summarizes some aspects of Bataille’s work that already Nancy underlines in *The Inoperative Community*.

¹⁵⁷ *Triumph of the Will* shows, for instance, some of the techniques to organize this affective machine: chanting, marching, singing, all those collective activities with the body as protagonist, activities that interested Bataille as well, and that Bataille re-stages at the end of *The Blue of Noon*. Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will*, NSDAP, 1936. Bataille, *The Blue of Noon*, *op. cit.*, pp 135-152.

outraged exclamation: Bataille is not countering fascism with an opposite solution, as Agamben says, he is shifting the terrain towards something like a fiction that is not distinguished from reality, a fiction that has a certain truth-effect. In “The Joy in front of Death”, a paper written for the College de Sociologie, Bataille says, “It is not a matter of dying at all, but of being transported ‘to the level of death’”.¹⁵⁸ To be transposed to the level of death Bataille proposes here a series of practical exercises, inspired by the actions of the mystics, which would open “breaches”, “wounds” and “lacerations” upon the surface of the individual body. This is the difference from both fascism and the catholic mystics: the laceration is not recomposed into a higher organization or organism, into a communion with God, into a fascist communion.

Following the mystic tradition, Bataille proposes the use of images to experience death. The image Bataille seems to prefer, reappearing in several of his texts, from the *Inner Experience* to the *Tears of Eros*, is the photograph of a Chinese torture, where we see a naked man, still alive, being cut into pieces. From representations of a crucified Christ for Saint Catherine of Siena, to Bataille’s photograph of the tortured body of a young man, from an ecstasy that becomes love for Jesus, to an affective uproar that is impossible to define; a “joy in front of death” that has nothing to do with sadistic pleasure, a “joy” that is sickening, horrifying (but a horror that provokes laughter). The disposition of the viewing subject becomes interleaved with the image being looked at, so that together they form a sort of theatrical machine, the machine of a dramatization that undermines the viewer as a distinct, detached subject.¹⁵⁹

In *Inner Experience*, in the section “First Digression on ecstasy before an object: the point”, Bataille relates the experience of the photograph of the Chinese torture to the “dramatization” of the *Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola. Bataille describes the process of ascesis as a dramatization which, through an “object point”, frees itself from discourse. “One only attains the point by dramatizing. To dramatize is what the devout person who follows the *Exercises* of Saint Ignatius do (but not them alone). If one were to imagine the place, the characters of the drama, or the drama itself, the torture to which Christ is led: Saint Ignatius disciple’s creates for himself a theatrical representation. He is a peaceful room: one asks him to have the feelings he would have on Calvary. Of these

¹⁵⁸ Denis Hollier ed., *The College of Sociology*, University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p 325.

¹⁵⁹ For a detailed analysis of the relation between the photograph and the use of images in Christian mysticism see Didi-Huberman, “L’immagine aperta”, *op. cit.*

feelings, one tells him he *should* have them, despite the calming nature of his room. One desires that he leave himself, intentionally dramatizing this human life, of which one knows in advance that it has every likelihood of being a half-anxious, half-dozing futile exercise. But as he does not yet have a properly inner life, one asks him to project the point of which I have spoken in the person of Jesus Christ in the throes of death. The projection of the point, in Christianity, is attempted before the mind has at its disposal its inner movements, before it has become free of discourse. It is only the rough projection, from which one attempts to attain non-discursive experience.”¹⁶⁰

Dramatization here concerns the construction of a theatre of affection, that triggers emotions “outside of the self”, and creates affects that exceed the self and “human life”. For Bataille the intrinsic weakness of this method is that it relies on discourse, and this discursive element is not easy to overcome. This “theatre” is discursive, based on language and words, and to go beyond this discursive dimension that otherwise leaves the self encircled by rational and consequential logic, we must project a “point”, by focusing on an image that resembles our self, a double of the self, a human body, the suffering, tortured and naked body of Christ, which Bataille doubles into the naked body of the suffering young Chinese.

The major difference between asceticism and ecstasy is already indicated in the quote above: for the mystic the “point” is not only something “similar” to himself, a human body, but is the holy body of Christ, the body of someone “he wants to be”, there is an aspiration, the ascendant movement of asceticism, a trajectory inscribed within an utilitarian framework. Bataille makes a difference between the domesticated and universal “I”, and a wild, absurd, unknowable “ipse”. “The ‘I’ is in fact the expression of the universal.”¹⁶¹ The mystic humiliates the sovereign *ipse* as the servile “I”, but only to restore the universal (God) to its “pride”. For the Christian mystic the “point” is the glorious body of Christ, God who once made himself a human being. For Bataille the “point” is an open body “beautiful as a wasp”, a body that becomes animal, that loses its human features.¹⁶²

Theatre is the bourgeois art par excellence. Bataille doubles this bourgeois theatre, the theatre of a respectful sociability where forms and appearances are what matters the

¹⁶⁰ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, *op. cit.*, p. 114 passim., p. 119.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p 115.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p 114 and 119.

most. Bataille destroys this theatre and turns it into a theatre where forms and images can trigger processes of (de)subjectivation. Fiction unfolds for real.

But there is something ridiculous about all this, about bourgeois theatre, about Bataille's becoming wasp in front a picture. Bataille's body is really (really?) breaking apart. This is a horrifying comedy that destroys Bataille as a viewing subject without driving him insane (but this is actually never guaranteed). Theatre, with its artificiality, its representations, its duplicity, becomes a "negative" Bataille doubles, a theatre of (bourgeois) zombies (*Demoni*).¹⁶³

Acephale is the secret society that (possibly) never even staged that supreme act of sacrifice. Even bareness in Bataille is theatrical. Bataille strips himself naked, he writes without resources, and still this bareness is nothing like a pure or natural nakedness, it is horrifying, laughable, vile, it is the nakedness of a worm, a spider, a wasp. It is theatrical as well, as in those theatre pieces of Beckett which Deleuze uses to double tiredness into exhaustion (but there is more violence in Bataille's abandonment, in his becoming animal, in the obscene dread of his body) ("what a dread!").

"In the end the patient writhed, his chest flayed, arms and legs cut off at the elbows and at the knees. His hair standing on end, hideous, haggard, striped with blood, beautiful as a wasp.

I write 'beautiful'! ... something escapes me, flees from me, fear robs me of myself and, as if I wanted to stare at the sun, my eyes rebel.

I had at the same time recourse to a type of dramatization stripped to the bare essentials. I did not set out like the Christian from a formal discourse, but also from a state of diffuse communication, from a felicity of inner movements."¹⁶⁴

Bataille is not looking for salvation, he is looking for "love", love for the young, attractive boy, love as communication of affective excess, far beyond sensations of pleasure or pain: "The young and seductive Chinese man of whom I have spoken, left to the work of the executioner – I loved him with a love in which the sadistic instinct

¹⁶³ Lamberto Bava, *Demoni*, DACFILM, 1985.

¹⁶⁴ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-20.

played no part: he communicated his pain to me or perhaps the excessive nature of his pain, and it was precisely that which I was seeking, not so as to take pleasure in it, but in order to ruin in me that which is opposed to ruin.”¹⁶⁵ This is neither a human feeling (compassion), nor a form of identification (there is no equation between Bataille and the Chinese boy). There is the emergence of affect as something that changes our body, there is “love” as the “impossible” love of a wasp for an orchid.

It follows a passage where Bataille addresses both the hypocritical attitude of the indignant spectator (images of war, torture, hunger, on TV and magazines, on the internet), and the similar attitude of the mystic that despises the world.¹⁶⁶ In both cases there is a separation of good and evil, high and low, a distancing and an exclusion (a distancing provoked by the media, an affective domestication, a distance and a domestication that we can nevertheless defy). “Before excessive cruelty, either that of men, or that of fate, it is natural to rebel, to cry out (our hearts fail us): ‘That can no longer be!’ and to weep, to lay the blame on some whipping-post. It is easier to tell oneself that which weeps and damps with me is my desire to sleep in peace: my fury at being disturbed.”¹⁶⁷ The *Inner Experience* can be partly read as a practical manual, describing bodily exercises to create “community” and “communication”. Bataille here uses a (spectacular) image to produce an impossible communication, a composition between bodies that liberates them from their individuation, a composition based on the impossibility of unity and coherence.

The experience of the photograph of the Chinese torture is just one example of theatrical fiction, of representation, of an image, used as a tool to instigate what Bataille intended with community: not a community with God, not a community with a head, not a community with unifying, hierarchical elements. It is from within this horizon, of a “fiction” which provokes “real” effects for subjectivity, that Bataille’s novels have to be read as part of a (political) project, together with his other writings. Writing itself, the different forms that it takes in Bataille, is a fiction, a representation that, as the photograph of the Chinese torture, has or can have effects on subjectivity. In Bataille’s writings there are so many degrees of variation between fiction and theory that it

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 120.

¹⁶⁶ Think also about Agamben’s reflection on indignation as the affection that the media produce and that paralyze the public in something like an indignant subjectivity; see previous chapter: Agamben, “Difference and Repetition: on Guy Debord’s Films”, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

¹⁶⁷ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, pp. 121.

becomes possible to take the most serious conference held for the College of Sociology as “fiction”, as a way of playing a game and using its rules on the verge of its ridiculous collapse.¹⁶⁸ As Bataille says in *L'Abbe' C*: “the filthiest of whores certainly do not behave any worse than us, but they aren't lucky enough TO KNOW IT”.¹⁶⁹ Here there is a small displacement from a filthy whore to Bataille himself: there is not much difference in their filthiness, but in Bataille there is always a component of fiction, of artifice, of construction, of theatricality, of “art” in the wide sense that the term has in the context of this thesis.

If we put aside the picture of the Chinese torture, we can see how often what Bataille proposes to use in his exercises to create community, are banal and everyday situations, “nude girls and whisky”, he says in “The Practice of Joy in front of Death”.¹⁷⁰ Bataille's eroticism, together with the practice of “joy in front of death”, is another way of creating “community”, of “sliding outside” yourself, outside the loving couple, the task of reproduction, the foundation of (bourgeois) society. Bataille does not offer us a Sadean repertoire of eccentric “perversions”, but the most banal and boring erotic encounter: just a man and a woman, it is the heterosexual couple who is doubled, providing a “communitarian” tool available to everybody, having started out from the most conventional social model. And so, even the Chinese torture could be seen for what it is, just a photograph found in a magazine.¹⁷¹

Agamben carries on with his philosophical reading of Bataille's community, repressing every sense it can have outside an exquisitely theoretical field: this is a “community of the *impossibility of community*”, a community, quoting Bataille, “of those who have not community”; but how precisely would this take place? “The exclusion of the head does not mean only elision of rationality and exclusion of a leader, but first of all the same auto-exclusion of the members of the community, who will be present only through their own decapitation, through their ‘passion’ in the strict sense of the world”.¹⁷² In this passage Agamben touches upon an important point, referring to Acephale's sacrifice as

¹⁶⁸ Compare the two versions of the “Joy in front of Death”, that of Acephale with the other written later for the College of Sociology, in which Bataille plays the game of sociological analysis. Bataille, “The Practice of Joy before Death”, in Bataille, *Vision of Excess*, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-239; Bataille, “Joy in the Face of Death”, in Hollier ed., *College of Sociology*, *op. cit.*, pp. 322-328.

¹⁶⁹ Bataille, *L'Abbé C*, Marion Boyars, 1983, p. 144.

¹⁷⁰ The version in Acephale, “those who would be afraid of nude girls or whisky would have little to do with ‘joy before death’.”, from “The Practice of Joy before Death”, *op. cit.*, p. 237

¹⁷¹ A photograph given to Bataille by his analyst Adrien Borel, and reproduced in a 1923 treatise of psychology, as mentioned also in Didi-Huberman, “L'immagine aperta”, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

¹⁷² Agamben, “Bataille e il paradosso della sovranita’”, *op. cit.* p. 116.

a gesture that with the same movement cuts the throat of both the sacrificed and the one who sacrifices, so that “passion” becomes an opening up of bodies to a deathly outside. This is “communication”, this is “communion”, an opening up to the outside, a shared opening towards the nothing of death. Violence here is never one-directional, it never implies a simple relation between two subjects, one active and the other passive, one master and one slave, one sovereign and the other subjected. Violence in Bataille is something that we exercise not without consequences for ourselves as the precipitators of violence: we affect and our body gets affected as well.

Agamben seems to take rather literally Acephale’s death and sacrifice. In the wound that opens to the outside there is nothing “paradoxical”, as Agamben claims: the possibility cannot be precluded that Bataille and his circle may not be performing actual sacrifices. As Bataille explains, and Agamben himself reports in the few pages that he dedicates to Bataille in *Homo Sacer*: “it is a comedy!” Sacrifice as a theatre of comedy, implying something like a farce.¹⁷³ “Sacrifice”, writes Bataille in the *Inner Experience*, is “the comedy that demands that a sole individual dies in the place of all the others”: he talks about a comedy and not a tragedy.¹⁷⁴ Agamben registers the theatrical aspects of Bataille’s sacrifice, but instead of interrogating it, he reports it in order to criticize Bataille for not taking seriously “bare life” (a life that can be terminated without having committed a crime), for playing with a serious condition that Agamben individuates as the hinge that sustains sovereignty. In a few words, this is the criticism that Agamben points at Bataille in *Homo Sacer*; and this is both a misunderstanding of Bataille’s “comedy” as opposed to seriousness (a mis-estimation of the place of fiction, theatricality and the ridiculous in Bataille), and a way of protecting the very seriousness of philosophy.¹⁷⁵

Here, in Acephale’s “fiction”, in the comedy of sacrifice, can be found the difference with fascism, the imperceptible shift of a doubling that Bataille and friends operate. The difference between Acephale and fascist community is that fascism does not KNOW IT, to employ the terms of *L’Abbe’ C* once more: it is like a filthy whore who does it for a purpose, as a job, to earn a living. In a similar way fascism does it whilst reinstating a

¹⁷³ Bataille, “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice” in Botting and Wilson eds., *The Bataille Reader*, Wiley, 1997, p. 287.

¹⁷⁴ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

¹⁷⁵ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-5. In *Language and Death* Agamben borrows the term “farce” from Kojève to describe Bataille’s philosophical comedy, his doubling of Hegelian dialectics, pp. 49-53.

head, a hierarchy, a rigid structure, a community of fusion (and exclusion, of course). Fascism uses affects, it liberates in all their danger affects that society has repressed or marginalized (the filthy whore), on a mass and contagious scale. Fascism is an affective politics based on death and deathly desires, where somehow the one who sacrifices ends up harming himself (fascism is also suicidal). The difference with Bataille and friends is that Fascism makes a calculated use of affects (as capitalism does), and at the same time drives towards real death, produces massacres and suicide (without “knowing it”). Bataille’s “comedy” is not opposed to this reality, sacrifice is not opposed to fiction, in the sense that Acephele was just pretending to deal with death. The “comedy” of sacrifice is *really* dangerous, and it is dangerous because it is completely uncertain. Instead of securing for us a solid agenda, a clear structure, a fixed goal, we play with a different, *perhaps* less literal death, with a death which is also the lack of a solid agenda, a clear structure, a fixed goal. With Bataille’s experiments with death and community it is a matter of “riding the line of life and death”, of exposing oneself to death without capitalizing from it.

In his essay Agamben talks not of sacrifice but of ecstasy, and defines it in these terms: “the decisive paradox of *ekstasis*, of this absolute being-outside-yourself of the subject, is that you are not there in the instant when you have this experience, you have to lack in yourself at the very moment when you are supposed to be present to have the experience. The paradox of Bataille’s ecstasy is that the subject has to be where it cannot be, or vice versa, it has to lack where it has to be present”.¹⁷⁶ Bataille does not talk of an “absolute being-outside-yourself”, but (for instance in ‘The Joy in front of Death’) of a ‘slipping outside-yourself’, which is never defined as absolute. Agamben immobilizes ecstasy, with his reading ecstasy is not a movement anymore, but a still, paradoxical condition, the coexistence of two opposites. If there is a paradox here, it is Agamben’s superimposed paradox: for someone who likes to take care of etymologies, “ecstasy”, a moving away from the stability of the self, becomes the opposites of what the etymon says: fixity and immobility. Ecstasy is not a condition, as Agamben implicitly says, it is a way of desiring. It can be triggered by “mystical” exercises, it can be intensified, constructed, but to some extent it is also an “everyday” experience (I’m fed up with myself, I want to change myself, get rid of myself, I cannot carry on like this anymore...).

¹⁷⁶ Agamben, “Bataille e il paradosso della sovranita’”, *op. cit.*, pp 116-7.

At this point Agamben makes an equation between his definition of ecstasy and a definition of sovereignty that he develops from Carl Schmitt, “the sovereign is at the same time inside and outside the [legal] system”.¹⁷⁷ Bataille’s sovereignty coincides here implicitly with the paradoxical exception that Agamben theorizes using Schmitt: “the sovereign, having the *legitimate* power of suspending the validity of law, *places himself legitimately outside of law*”.¹⁷⁸ Bataille, says Agamben, by thinking the “sovereign subject”, that is, the paradox of “dwelling where the subject is not”, does not break the circle of this paradox of “being *above* of what is *below*”, the paradox of a *subject* that is sub-jected and *sov-ereign* at the same time (Agamben multiplies the dichotomies here).¹⁷⁹ It is certainly useful for us to think ecstasy together with Bataille’s sovereignty, but for Bataille it is not so much a matter of “thinking” sovereignty, and it is never a matter of “dwelling”, neither here nor somewhere else. Dwelling is always on the side of the “circle”, of the enclosure of a subject. This circle for Bataille would be a “travail”: the encircling that Agamben here keeps reproducing. Sovereignty in Bataille is the moving away of the subject from itself, a liberation of the subject from its “circle”.

The way Agamben reads Bataille’s “passionate effort” is also philosophical. If we look at the *Inner Experience*, which Agamben defines “perhaps his most ambitious book”, we can see that what gets produced here is not just philosophy as a thinking discipline. Bataille offers tools and examples for others and himself to undo the identity of a subject with itself, the identity of Bataille as a philosopher. *Inner Experience* provides not just a philosophical communication of thoughts, it is a manual of tools for an activism that starts from the subject, from Bataille himself, from his body, and undoes the coherent boundaries of identities, the consistency of a subject, a reader, a writer. *Inner Experience* is an affective machine, writing arranged as machines that produce affects and variations of intensities. Writing becomes an affective “representation”, words are used to construct a text that exceeds a rational logic of signification. *Inner Experience* is not, or not just, a philosophical work, as Agamben reads it, it is a manual of desubjectivation, it is “losing oneself (escaping isolation, the individual’s turning him on himself)”.¹⁸⁰ If here, in comparison with *Acephale* and the *College de Sociologie*, Bataille appears alone, it is perhaps to better strike bourgeois and capitalist

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p 117

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

individuation, isolation, seclusion (and not to present himself as a philosopher tormented by his paradoxical thoughts).¹⁸¹

In *Inner Experience* Bataille treats both yoga and Christian mysticism as practical means with which to undermine the enclosure of the subject. Christian mystics use a method of “dramatization”, a way of unleashing affects through a theatrical representation. As we have seen, this method is “discursive”, based on the rationality of language, and is part of a larger project defined by a superior goal. Yoga is also based on a “project”, but it relies on less complicated tools, it is based on breathing, on movements of the body, for an absorption into a nothingness that uses representations in the form of visualizations. Bataille in the *Inner Experience* unfastens these practices from their servitude to a transcendent goal:

“30. From the outset, the sovereign operation presents a difficulty so great that one has to look for it in a slipping.

The slave-subject of Christianity attributed (returned) sovereignty to the god-object, whose project wanted to see that one grasped oneself, in effect, as an object of possession. The god of the mystics is free (relatively) by definition; the mystic is not (on the contrary, he is even willingly submissive to moral servitude).

31. A Buddhist is more proud. The Christian submits himself, in suffering, to the empire of activity, believing he reads therein a divine will that wants his subordination. The Buddhist denies this empire, yet behaves in turn as a slave: he considers himself as fallen, and he must situate the sovereignty that he wants for himself in the other world. He engages himself equally in the contradictions of *work* in view of a sovereign moment.”¹⁸²

Bataille repeats the exercises of the mystics and of yoga away from their frameworks, for a different purpose, that is to say, for no purpose at all. If they both aspire to salvation, Bataille, on the contrary, aims to get lost through them.

¹⁸¹ And if for Bataille it was “impossible” to terminate his book on sovereignty, is not, as Agamben says, because of the difficulty of *thinking* the sovereignty of the subject, but probably because Bataille got bored with his own attempt of systematizing philosophically “sovereignty”. Bataille *Sovereignty. The Accursed Share III*, in Bataille, *The Accursed Share II and III*, MIT Press, 1992.

¹⁸² Bataille’s “Méthode de méditation” appears in the 1956 edition of *L'expérience intérieure*, and it is published in English as “Method of Meditation” in Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, University of Minnesota Press, 2004, pp. 77-102.

“Let one imagine now a different and even opposite will where the will to ‘become everything’ would be regarded as an obstacle to that of losing oneself (of escaping isolation, the individual’s turning in on himself). Where ‘becoming everything’ would be considered not only as the sin of man but of all that is possible and even of God!

To lose oneself in this case would be to lose oneself and *in no way to save oneself*. (One will see further on the passion which man brings to the contesting of each slip in the direction of the whole, of salvation, of the possibility of a project). But then the possibility for ascesis disappears!

Nevertheless inner experience is project, no matter what.

It is such – man being entirely so through language which, in essence, with the exception of its poetic perversion, is project. But project is no longer in this case that, positive, of salvation, but that, negative, of abolishing the power of words, hence of project.”¹⁸³

Beside releasing yoga and mystic techniques from their teleological framework, there is another issue at stake, a challenging task that Bataille tries to face from the very beginning of *Inner Experience*: how to deal with the “project” of the inner experience, to deal with the “work” we put into it. In his essay, Agamben defines Bataille as a philosopher of passivity. We could read *Inner Experience* as a way of coming to terms with the binary action/passivity. Agamben references Kojève who quotes a sentence from *Inner Experience* to prove that “l’expérience intérieure est le contraire de l’action.”¹⁸⁴ But we need to understand what Bataille means by “action” here. Action is not the opposite of passivity, it is on the side of labor, productivity and usefulness. And the opposition action/passivity is posited by Bataille in very concrete terms, it is a problem that has to do with Bataille writing a book that would allow both himself and his reader to lose themselves, through a method that serves to escape the enclosure of the individual, but at the same time, as a method, always risks reproducing that enclosure. We encountered a similar problem in the previous chapter, with constructed situations, where construction, artifice, organization (the project, work, usefulness) came together with situation, with the unforeseen, with life. In Bataille the problem

¹⁸³ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁸⁴ Agamben, “Bataille e il paradosso della sovranità”, *op. cit.*, p 118.

risers already with the act of writing: I write what is not reducible to words, what exceeds the significance of writing. How can I communicate “communication”, as something that takes place away from the communication of a message? How can I write an activist manual without reducing the cases to prescriptive examples, or to exercises of a self-help handbook?

In the last part of the essay on Bataille’s “paradox of sovereignty”, Agamben frames the discussion in terms of *potenza* and *atto*, the two polarities of potentiality. As he sometimes does, Agamben starts with Aristotle and his duality of *dynamis* and *energeia*. And follows: “We are accustomed to think the term *potenza* mostly in the sense of power. But *potenza* is first of all *passive potenza*, passion in the etymological sense of *patimento* [torment, suffering], passivity, and only later as *active potenza* and force. Of those two poles through which western philosophy has been thinking being, modern thought, from Nietzsche onwards, has been constantly thinking the pole of *potenza*. For this reason in Bataille, and in those thinkers near to him like Blanchot, what is decisive is the experience of passion, of that “dechainement des passions” in which he discerned the ultimate sense of the sacred. [...] Contemporary thought, trying to overcome the subject and being, abandons the experience of the act, which has indicated for centuries the vertex of metaphysics, but only to exasperate and push to the extreme the opposed polarity of *potenza*.”¹⁸⁵ Agamben here identifies an epochal break for philosophy, a before and after, the breakpoint of which is Nietzsche: before Nietzsche Western philosophy was concerned with action, with the subject, with being, and starting with Nietzsche, and in order to overcome being and the subject, philosophy places itself on the other side of the polarity. The solution for Agamben lies in an in-between that can already be found in Aristotle, the philosopher at the origin of metaphysics, as a “gift of the self to itself”, as both an “annihilation” and a “salvation”. In other words, Bataille, Blanchot, Nietzsche are on the side of annihilation, which is also the side of fascism, whilst Agamben proposes an equilibrium between annihilation and salvation. In this way Agamben arranges the entire history of Western philosophy according to an active/passive polarity, with Bataille firmly situated on the side of passivity.

What is the ultimate purpose of Agamben’s operation in his “Bataille e il paradosso della sovranita”? It is a reaffirmation of philosophy as a historical discipline, a

¹⁸⁵ Agamben, “Bataille e il paradosso della sovranita”, *op. cit.*, p 118.

reaffirmation that catalogues Nietzsche, Bataille, Blanchot, as *the* modern philosophers, whilst amongst all “philosophers” they are probably the most difficult to define as such. In order to maintain his equilibrium, the balance of his potentiality, the safety of his position, Agamben needs to reinterpret and steer away from a philosopher who is not really a philosopher, from someone who shares so many issues with him, from a writer that looks like the ridiculous double, the *controfigura*, of himself. Agamben needs to protect himself as a philosopher, from Bataille exposing himself and Philosophy to a burst of laughter. Agamben neutralizes Bataille, and the danger of a passion that is not a “suffering”. It is not passivity versus activity, but the collapsing of a pretension of integrity, of the coherence of a discipline, of the lucidity of the philosopher, of the consistency of the subject.



APPENDIX 3: Nanopolitics - how to think politics from and with the body (Grinberg Method)

2 Fascism, microfascism, affective manipulation (part one: Bataille)

“That is why the fundamental problem of political philosophy is still precisely the one that Spinoza saw so clearly, and that Wilhelm Reich rediscovered: “Why do men fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?” [...] Reich is at his profoundest as a thinker when he refuses to accept ignorance or illusion on the part of the masses as an explanation of fascism, and demands an explanation that will take their desires into account, an explanation formulated in terms of desire: no, the masses were not innocent dupes; at a certain point, under a certain set of conditions, they wanted fascism, and it is this perversion of the desire of the masses that needs to be accounted for.” Deleuze and Guattari¹⁸⁶

“We must cease to believe that methods invented by our adversaries are necessarily bad. On the contrary, we must, in turn, use those methods against them. [...] We must learn how to use for the liberation of the exploited those weapons that were forged for their greater enslavement.” Bataille¹⁸⁷

The above statement can be found in “Toward Real Revolution” a text written by Bataille for *Acephale* (and considered by Denis Hollier the “most directly political of

¹⁸⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, *op. cit.*, p 29

¹⁸⁷ Bataille, “Toward Real Revolution”, in *October*, Vol. 36, *Georges Bataille: Writings on Laughter, Sacrifice, Nietzsche, Un-Knowing* (Spring, 1986), 32-41. Pp 37-38.

the texts he ever wrote”).¹⁸⁸ Here Bataille’s agenda is expressed straightforwardly: to turn the methods used by his enemies against them. These enemies are identifiable in the form of representative democracy, State Communism, and Fascism. We need to create a different way of making politics, and to do that we need to make a different use of tools and methods of the kinds of politics we want to overcome. Bataille therefore provides an example of this activism of doubling, a repetition in difference as a way of making something else. Amongst the three political enemies Bataille is attracted by the third, the most recently emerged and the most powerful in terms of an (affective) mobilization of the masses.

To talk about fascism and microfascism is a way not only of reading Bataille’s doubling activism, but also of addressing the problem of the “cancerous body” Deleuze and Guattari warn against in their *Body without Organs* plateau.¹⁸⁹ Bataille, together with Wilhelm Reich, was one of the first to analyze fascism as a political movement. What has become of fascism today? We won’t deal with neonazism here, but with a desire which, on an everyday basis and even in the most politicized (“leftist”) contexts (Guattari often uses the term “microfascism” in relation to collectives of activists), becomes a stratified desire, a deathly desire, producing a sanitizing exclusion, an elimination of the “dirt” Bataille is passionate for. A desire that to some extent, and especially in its micro forms, proves to be compatible with capitalism.

In the last part of “How to Make Yourself a Body without Organs” Deleuze and Guattari give a name to the dangers related with the making of a BwO. They talk of a “theory of the three bodies”, of a suicidal and a fascist body alongside the “other” BwO of which they speak. The three bodies are different kinds of BwO, but the kind of desire produced through them is different: desire as suicidal, as fascist, as “other”. From these pages emerges a notion of fascism as microfascism, as something that is “inside of us”, produced through our bodies as a fascist desire. “Cancerous tissue: each instant, each second, a cell becomes cancerous, mad, proliferates and loses its configuration, takes over everything; the organism must resubmit it to its rule or re-stratify it, not only for its own survival, but also to make possible an escape from the organism, the fabrication of

¹⁸⁸ Denis Hollier, “On Equivocation: (Between Literature and Politics)”, *October* 55 (Winter, 1990): 3-22; p 14.

¹⁸⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, “How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?”, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, *op. cit.*

the 'other' BwO on the plane of consistency.”¹⁹⁰ The fascist body has a cancerous tissue, it is a body whose cells lose their shape in a wild deterritorialization, to get stratified more strongly or to return to the organization of the organism. Fascism is both deterritorialization and proliferation of strata. “Take the stratum of signifiante: once again, there is a cancerous tissue, this time of signifiante, a burgeoning body of the despot that blocks any circulation of signs, as well as preventing the birth of the asignifying sign on the "other" BwO. Or take a stifling body of subjectification, which makes a freeing all the more unlikely by forbidding any remaining distinction between subjects.”¹⁹¹ The fascist body is a sick double of the “other” BwO: if there is a deterritorialization underway here that results in the order of the organism getting lost, this nevertheless leads to a stronger obstruction and solidification of the strata, instead of a reduction of their rigidity as with the “other” BwO. Fascism is something like an illness that develops out of strata, whereas the “other” BwO is something that we actively make ourselves, rather than something we subject to.

In Bataille as well there is a proximity between his own way of desubjectifying and fascist (de)subjectivation, between his “community” and a fascist communitarian politics. To understand Bataille’s “community without community” in relation with the fascist community we could think of the examples of *Acephale* and of the fascist community incarnated in the Nazi mass parade, as described by Klaus Theweleit in *Male Fantasies*.¹⁹² They are both deathly communities in their own way, they are both sacrificial, theatrical, but in the fascist parade there is an unleashing of desire, a temporal and relative release of the repressed flood of desire in its theatrical and rigidly controlled form: the fascist parade is a desperately needed relief for the fascist body, afflicted by the “double bind” of incitement of desire and its repression. In *Acephale* the sacrifice would provoke the death of both the victim and the perpetrator, what is unleashed is the possibility of communication, a negative identification, or a collective disidentification, taking place through a staged violence, a flow of bodily fluids, (anarchic) destruction of every possibility of a hierarchical organization of our bodies or the body of the collective. What unfolds here is an erotic desire, a “filthy” desire, which messes up our bodies and our identities through a contamination that will possibly spread as a flow, and not through the reproduction of a stratification.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p 163

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² For example the end of Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, volume 1, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pp. 429-435.

With fascism we have an affective politics, a politics where the body is central, but the fascist body is far away from Bataille's filthy, ridiculous, obscene, uncontrollable body: it is the canonical body, the Aryan body, the athletic body, the upright body, the clean body, the body of Arno Breker, which is not far away from the bourgeois body – it is more heavily stratified, a disciplined fusion of bundles of muscles.¹⁹³ It is also the body of the fascist troops or the fascist parade. But there is not an opposition here, Bataille is not opposing his dirty body, his depravation, to the clean and sound body of the fascist, because there is no model for his body. The “clean” body of the fascist is cancerous, it desperately tries to stay clean but it never succeeds, beyond the appearances (and this anxiety can be read in the configurations of Breker's bodies). Bataille's body is not filthy as if this would be its characteristic. Bataille is a respectable librarian and also the filthiest Parisian whore: this is not a double personality, it is a repeated falling onto the ground, into filth, and a rising up again, or it is ridiculous attempt. Laughter is not opposed to fascist seriousness, it is a sudden but continuous collapse of a body. Bataille's body can never be localized, it can never be defined. This is Bataille's filthiness, this is the way his body counters the fascist body, stiffened in the rigidity of the ranks.

With the fascist community we have a deathly machine, which gets constituted as the control, repression, and capitalization of a fluid, liquid, uncontrollable desire. The waves of the sea get enclosed by a dam, the uncontrollable desire of the masses is embanked by the ordered ranks of a parade with its waving flags. It is desire that animates fascist community, but this is constructed as a defensive and aggressive desire, it is violent, but towards the supposed impurity that wants to eliminate. With Bataille there is a passion for filthiness through which the self (actively) loses control over itself, and with fascism there is an obsession for cleanness and control: fascist violence and death are clean, calculated, organized, stratified, the subject has to be controlled. There is something obsessive with fascist desire, an obsessive desire of cleanness combined with death. It is better to be dead than being contaminated with something so filthy, this is what sustains the fascist ritual, and the idea of immolation for the Land, of the noble death. Blood is part of the symbolic theatre of fascism, but when it comes to killing the

¹⁹³ Arno Breker (1900-1991) was Hitler's favourite sculptor, author of the most important public sculptures of the Nazi regime and champion of an art antithetic to the “degenerate art” of the avant-gardes.

gas chamber and a purifying fire are the methods to be used. There is no “communication” through fascist desire, there might be something like a fusion, a fusion which excludes the “other”, which requires the death of the other. This fusion is a hyper-stratification, where death and violence are always intended for someone else, as something that does not have to touch us, it does not have to contaminate us. Bataille’s need to rethink sovereignty emerges also from a confrontation with fascism, with its illusion of sovereignty as something implying a distinct separation between perpetrator and victim.

The cancerous fascist body and the suicidal empty body that violently eliminate the organs are two kinds of bodies without organs. The fascist body is also suicidal but always in the sense of a spreading annihilation, not as a self-reflexive violence. Fascism proliferates like a cancer, this is the “contagion” Bataille was interested in, fascism’s strength. As an illness fascism is latent in every stratum, in every social formation, and in each of us.

In both Bataille and Deleuze and Guattari fascism is a configuration of desire, a process of desiring. “That is why the material problem confronting schizoanalysis is knowing whether we have it within our means to make the selection, to distinguish the BwO from its doubles: empty vitreous bodies, cancerous bodies, totalitarian and fascist.”¹⁹⁴ Fascism for Deleuze and Guattari, as for Bataille, has not to do with ideology, but with the body, with desire, affects, intensities. They demand that we watch over our desires, the fascist desire of proliferating strata, and they encourage an activism of desire, how to “make” desire ourselves, how to intervene in the production of desires.

Deleuze and Guattari’s desire is different from psychoanalytic desire. Through psychoanalysis we think and experience desire as desiring something or someone, desire as having a subject and an object, desire as lack, as the impossible task of fulfilling a goal. In Deleuze and Guattari desire has no object, it is not generated by a subject, it is concatenation, a set of conjunctions. Desire is “productive”, Deleuze and Guattari talk of a production of desire, not as production of objects of desire, but as a passage of flowing forces. This desire differs from that of capitalism, which is always part of a framework, of a bigger machinery with its axioms, capitalizing on desire, using

¹⁹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, “How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?”, op.cit., p 165

desire as a fuel to nourish those axioms: to accumulate profit, to intensify productivity, and so on.

The use of the term “fascism” has recently increased in the public debate in Italy, in the context, not of neo-nazi groups, but State politics. The major Italian right wing parties governing the country (Popolo della Libertà, Lega Nord, Alleanza Nazionale - Berlusconi, Bossi, Fini), especially because of their migration politics and their “Pacchetto Sicurezza” (2009: a package of laws for the “security” of the Italian citizens), belong to a lineage of “historical” fascism.¹⁹⁵ Italy is certainly not alone in this tendency, the whole of Europe seems to be increasingly embracing a Political right that incites racism and xenophobia in order to increase its power (in this respect there are still some differences between right and left). Bataille (and Deleuze and Guattari) shows us how a macrofascism always implies a microfascism, a certain way to affect the body, to shape subjectivation. To read Bataille’s responses to fascism, his “doubling” of fascism, and Deleuze and Guattari’s microfascism in conjunction with Bataille’s theory and practice, is a way of providing not just a specification of what (micro)fascism is and how it works, but also modalities to counter it and “double” it.

Bataille writes his essay on fascism in 1933, a couple of years before the foundation of Contre-Attaque: in the “The Psychological Structure of Fascism” he sees fascism not as an ideology, but as an affective politics, a political movement whose strength is in its use of “affective forces”.¹⁹⁶ For Bataille these affective forces are the condition of politics, and what he proposes in this essay is to study and “up to a point” master these forces, to carefully calculate the use of “renovated affective forces”. In comparison with later writings like *The Inner Experience*, here Bataille’s “project” plays a considerable part. And, more clearly than in later writings, Bataille proposes here a politics that is based on affects, emphasising that politics has nothing to do with morality or idealism.

“Yet it would be puerile to presume to enclose the world in such a neat construction: from the outset, the mere consideration of affective social formations reveals the immense resources, the inexhaustible wealth of the forms particular to affective life. Not only are the psychological situations of the democratic collectivities, like any human situation, transitory, but it remains possible to envision, at least as a yet imprecise

¹⁹⁵ See for instance the new preface of Bifo’s *Come si cura il nazi*, *op.cit.*

¹⁹⁶ Bataille, “The Psychological Structure of Fascism”, in *Visions of Excess*, *op. cit.*, pp 137-160.

representation, forms of attraction that differ from those already in existence, as different from present or even past communism as fascism is from dynastic claims. A system of knowledge that permits the anticipation of the affective social reactions that traverse the superstructure and perhaps even, to a certain extent, do away with it, must be developed from one of these possibilities. The fact of fascism, which has thrown the very existence of a workers' movement into question, clearly demonstrates what can be expected from a timely recourse to reawakened affective forces. Unlike the situation during the period of utopian socialism, morality and idealism are no more questions today than they are in fascist forms.”¹⁹⁷

Later on, during the war, the “weapon” for Bataille will be not a system of knowledge that takes affects as the object of study, but affects themselves, forces that undo systems. From a consideration of the political field Bataille will move to “action”, to a practice that apparently looks away from what is commonly intended with politics, from politics as dwelling in the realm of consciousness. Whether dealing with movements, collectives, or indeed himself, Bataille treats politics as an affective question.

In “The Psychological Structure of Fascism” Bataille reads fascism as a combination of militarism and religion: a military organization marked by duty and discipline (here too Bataille talks of affective relations) is combined with a collective affectivity which, as in religious sacrifice, forms a mass, a mass fused with its transcendental leader. In its double nature, fascism both affirms (a religious kind of) “revolution” as its foundation, and at the same time negates it through its military domination. Revolutionary effervescence is put to work, controlled and redirected, as in Theweleit’s description of troops and parades, not just in order to fight a war, but as a way to dominate a society. The religious, sacrificial tool, which unleashes affects through a theatre of deathly symbols, is channelled into a system of domination. “Qualities characteristic of the two dominations (internal and external, military and religious) are simultaneously implied: qualities derived from the introjected homogeneity, such as duty, discipline, and obedience; and qualities derived from the essential heterogeneity, imperative violence, and the positioning of the chief as the transcendent object of collective affectivity.”¹⁹⁸ Fascism requires from its “participants” “passion” and “ecstasy”, inserted into a system organized around a transcendental leader. “Sacrifice” is played out by fascism through

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p 159

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p 153-4.

the construction of impressive stages, often designed by Alfred Speer, like the Zeppelinfeld stadium.¹⁹⁹ This fascist “passion”, triggered through theatrical and spectacular techniques, is often something like fear and revulsion, it is a “passion” that demands the extermination of the foreign other, of the dirty body of the other (Jews, Communists, Gypsies, homosexuals, people affected by illness, and, less evidently but more profoundly, women).²⁰⁰ The Italian *squadre fasciste* used to force dissidents to drink Castor oil before beating them: they had to shit themselves before being beaten, they had to be dirty in the most basic way, they had to bear a visual and sensorial sign of their suppression.

In 1937 Bataille wrote for *Acephale* two essays on Nietzsche and fascism. Bataille specifies here an affective politics in terms of a Nietzschean politics: a politics beyond the political. In “Nietzsche and the Fascists” Bataille discusses the fascist appropriation of Nietzsche.²⁰¹ Fascism attempts to subdue Nietzsche because it is attracted by the “violent instincts” that he mobilizes, but Nietzsche’s work implies the defeat of both right and left, of both the affective attachment to the past of the right, and the rational principles of justice and equality of the left. “The teachings of Nietzsche “mobilize” the will and the aggressive instincts; it was inevitable that existing activities would try to draw into their movement these now mobile and still *unemployed* wills and instincts.”²⁰² Bataille hurls Nietzsche back onto fascism, so that fascism collapses onto itself as “enslaved to a past”, to a race, to a fatherland, and as “enslaving” forces, capitalizing on them. Bataille and his friends experiment with another, non-utilitarian, affective politics, a politics where nothing is secured, where you always take up the challenge of dealing with a destructivity of the forces at play.

As a continuation of “Nietzsche and the Fascists” Bataille wrote “Nietzschean Chronicle”.²⁰³ He starts by discussing the crisis of traditional community and the increased individualism of contemporary society, which, in order to hold together, makes use of “politics” as trade and haggling: “when communal passion is not great enough to constitute human strengths, it becomes necessary to use constraint and to

¹⁹⁹ Filmed by Leni Riefensthal in her *Triumph of the Will*, Universum Film AG, 1934.

²⁰⁰ In his book *Theweleit* deals with the micro of a fascist bodily fear, repulsion and attraction for the “other” body of the woman, which translates into the macro of fascist “ornaments” like parades. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 1, *op. cit.*, pp. 429-435.

²⁰¹ Bataille, “Nietzsche and the Fascists”, in *Visions of Excess*, pp 182-196.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p 185

²⁰³ Bataille, “Nietzschean Chronicle”, in *Visions of Excess*, *op. cit.*, pp 202-212.

develop the alliances, contracts, and falsifications that are called politics. When human beings become autonomous they discover around themselves a false and empty world. The awareness of being a dupe before administrative impudence (and also before terrifying displays of individual satisfaction and stupidity) succeeds the strong and painful feeling of communal unity.”²⁰⁴

Fascism is defined by Bataille as a “recovery of a lost world”, it operates a nostalgic recovery of a lost community through a “brutal violence.” Bataille is interested in this recovery of the past. It is easier to restore than to create, says Bataille. Fascism restores the past, and Bataille proposes a creation that would be not creating anew, but dealing with what comes from the past to the present as a ruin. Sacrifice, ecstasy, community work for Bataille in their incomplete and ruined state, after the end of religion, the death of God, the collapse of community, beyond the particular functionality they once had. On its side fascism recuperates them, restoring the coherence of their usefulness, reviving these values so as to capitalize upon them. In a similar way, Speer, for his mass (and male) choreographies, conceives of settings inspired by imperial architecture, but also designs buildings that in a thousand years will emanate splendour and magnificence in a state of ruin, in a deathly state.²⁰⁵

This is how Bataille describes the fascist solution: “since the necessity of a renewed social cohesion can, at certain moments, be felt in the most pressing way, the first movement of recomposition takes place in the form of a return to the past. The crudest and most directly usable fundamental values are capable, in bitter and hateful crises, of taking on a dramatic meaning that seems to restore real color to communal existence, whereas on the whole it is a matter of an operation in which the affective values set in motion are in large part used for ends other than themselves.”²⁰⁶ Bataille talks of “nostalgia for a community” fascism that makes use of, the social bond invested with a “dramatic sense”. It exploits the (contemporary) desire of people for something like a social bond, for a sense of security and protection that used to come from relations that capitalist deterritorialization destroys. Pacchetto Sicurezza appeals to this sense of a lost community; and not only – it more or less directly incriminates migrants (the Other) with having spoiled the old community. It is unsettling then to read Bataille and see

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p 203

²⁰⁵ Norman Baynes ed., *The Speeches of Adolph Hitler April 1922 – August 1989*, Oxford University Press, 1942, p. 584

²⁰⁶ Bataille, “Nietzschean Chronicle”, op. cit., p 204.

how already eighty years ago, far before our present memories of a convivial society, the social bond was perceived as gone or at least threatened, and how politicians and Politics would capitalize on these feelings and perceptions.

Bataille's analysis of fascism can be used today as a critique not only of the fascism of right wing parties, but of party politics as a whole, to the extent that it has become a Politics which, as Fascism did in the '30s, instigates dramatization and capitalizes on affects that it itself has produced. This dramatization of Politics and its politicians is not far away from the spectacle offered by TV series, soap operas and reality shows. But what a different spectacle from the fascist ones of the '30s! It could be said that fascism has gone micro since then, it has being domesticated, it entered our homes, it has no need to drag us onto the streets. Economization of capitalism: a TV, a computer with an internet connection, an iPhone, seem to be enough today to produce what Speer's gigantic architectures used to do – repulsion for the dirty body of the migrant invading the beauty of our country like an unstoppable flow coming from the (Mediterranean) sea, spoiling our landscapes, degrading our homes, menacing our women. Sexually threatening bodies, bodies moved by a savage, barbarian, uncontainable desire. If the right wing parties incite a violent erasure (expulsion) of the foreign other, the left pursues a proper, legal, clean and peaceful application of laws and human rights (this is the attitude of the bourgeoisie as Bataille criticizes it). Bataille seems to say to us: it is not by fighting for rights that we will counter this kind of fascism. This is not to say that fighting for rights is useless, but here our bodies are at stake, and it is from our bodies coming together that we can counter microfascism (from our bodies as not separated from our rights).

In this essay on Nietzsche Bataille opposes to fascism a theatrical performance: "The Performance of *Numantia*". *Numantia* is a tragedy written by Cervantes and, as Bataille notes, was performed in Paris in 1937 with costumes and set designed by his friend Andre Masson. *Numantia* stages a mythological tale: the people of Numantia, after a long siege, prefer to kill each other rather than surrender to the Romans. Here Bataille specifies the "ruins" fascism and counter-fascism deal with in terms of "survivals", "junk", and the theatrical, in the sense of a fiction that unleashes affective forces.

Bataille doubles fascist re-presentations with a theatre performance. He talks here of a representation he has recently seen in a theatre in Paris: this is a mythological theatre, a

“performance” where a collectivity appears *vividly* involved in the events, more vividly than in the funereal speeches of the Duce to the mass, the revival of the symbols of imperial grandeur, the war memorials to celebrate the fallen and the glory of the fascio.²⁰⁷ There is something like a gloomy aesthetics in this fascist theatre the masses take part of, a mixture of nostalgia and glorification through a staging of death (something very different from a “joy before death”).²⁰⁸

Bataille proposes a medium that at first sight can do little in comparison with the spectacular fascist tools of affective mobilization: a simple theatrical representation in a bourgeois theatre of Paris. *Numantia* is not far away from the photographs of the Chinese torture Bataille uses in his experiments of dramatization. With *Numantia* a collectivity is represented, but not in the form of a return to a belief in God, religion or mythology. The young Chinese experiences death, and so *Numantia* does, through a collective sacrifice: *Numantia* is a community facing death, facing the night, the irrational.²⁰⁹

Bataille explains how “military existence” excludes the dramatization of this kind of theatre, how the army uses death as a way to make the living march better. Its most tragic representation is the parade, which excludes the tragedy of anxiety: the parade as a way to tame the anxieties of the mass, as a way of ordering and controlling it. The fatherland, says Bataille, makes use of military brutality for itself, through a specific usefulness, with barracks, prisons, military administration. *Numantia* does something other than performing and strengthening a sense of fatherland, Bataille demonstrates that *Numantia* is irreducible to the servile, it does not serve anything at all, not an idea of fatherland (*Numantia* against Rome), not an individual drama of the hero suffering in isolation, and not “politics”, that Bataille intends here as the politics of parties and politicians, politics as manipulation and compromise, as the realm of usefulness and calculation of parliamentary democracy. *Numantia* is another battle, a non-military

²⁰⁷ One of the more impressive Italian monuments is the *Monumento alla Vittoria* in Bolzano, built in 1926-28 by Marcello Piacentini, who used a sketch provided by the Duce himself.

²⁰⁸ This gloomy fascist aesthetics grazes a funereal depression in the most intimate work of Mario Sironi, one of the most important artist working for the Fascist regime. Another example of the centrality of funereal (and narcissistic) staging in fascism comes from Gabriele d’Annunzio, see especially *The Flame of Life*, Howard Fertig, 1990, and *Notturmo*, Yale University Press, 2012.

²⁰⁹ Bataille, “Nietzschean Chronicle”, *op. cit.*, p 208

struggle, it is a double of a fascist war, an “expression of a game”, the “emotional and lacerated game of life with death.”²¹⁰

Numantia is not reducible to a “political” instrument, it cannot serve the cause of fascism, and it cannot serve anti-fascism either. Numantia has been represented by red militiamen in the Spain of the civil war, in a Saragossa besieged by the fascists, it is said that the theatrical representation helped the cause of anti-fascism. Possibly the people of Saragossa, identifying themselves with the people of Numantia, took strength and braveness from the latter, but Bataille is not interested in this result, if it gets reduced to an end, if it puts Numantia to work.

Bataille criticizes the anti-fascist struggle for being “anti-”, for being driven by an opposition, for being simply a negation. “If the image of Numantia expresses the grandeur of a people struggling against oppression by the powerful, it reveals at the same time that the struggle currently engaged in most often lacks any grandeur: the antifascist movement, if it is compared to Numantia, appears to be an empty mob, a vast decomposition of men linked only by what they refuse. There is only illusion and comfort in admiring Numantia because one sees in it an expression of the current struggle. But tragedy confronts the world of politics with an evident truth: the battle joined will only take on a meaning and will only be effective to the extent that fascist wretchedness comes face to face with something other than troubled negation - namely, the heartfelt community of which Numantia is the image.”²¹¹ From the “anti-” of anti-fascism Bataille moves to a “doubling”, from an opposition that finds in theatre psychological strength, to “the tormenting image of a tragedy”.²¹²

And from *Numantia* we move to the theatre of *Mujeres Creando*: *Mujeres Creando*'s street theatre can be read as an example of a (Bataillean) counter-fascism. Maria throws

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p 209.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p 209-210.

²¹² The sense of Bataille's interest in “doubling” fascism comes also from a lost conference paper that Bataille wrote in 1939 for the College de Sociologie, titled “Hitler and the Teutonic Order”. Denis Hollier explains that Bataille was interested in religious orders and orders of chivalry to study their capacity of creating community. In a way, the College of Sociologie itself was intended as such community. Bataille had some photographs showing Nazis making use of castles that used to be property of the Teutonic Order. His idea was that the most important part of the Nazi organization was formed as chivalric orders used to be. Acephale and also the College de Sociologie would have a similar role to the Nazi Order. Bataille looks at both ancient and fascist ways of organizing and forming groups to learn techniques of “group formations” which place the “sacred” at their core. In Hollier ed., *The College of Sociology*, *op. cit.*, pp. 215-217.

buckets of bloods and wooden crosses on the square, naming the people who disappeared and got killed under the current dictatorship. A crowd of passersby watches, but when the policemen try to stop Maria, and the child she is carrying bursts into tears, their outrage explodes. We could read this performance as a ritual, as a sacrifice where Maria plays the character of both the “persecutor” and the victim. She exposes herself to danger, using symbols of death in such a way as to provoke people’s reaction, to produce an affective uproar that often explodes in a violent action. The roles are not always clear as in this performance where people get on the side of Maria denouncing the assassinations. When a group of prostitutes expose the naked bodies of men, their head covered with a hood, around the monument of the main square in La Paz, and start painting their penises in different colours, fights explode amongst the citizens and against Mujeres Creando. This uproar has no boundaries, it crosses categories, it collides with the instigators, it starts from the body or images of the body (a crucifix with a man on one side and a woman on the other); it provokes public outrage, a chaotic confrontation of bodies that have lost their composure. This affective upheaval and this violent clash of bodies is not an end in itself, it is the beginning of something. It is what at the Camden Arts Centre did not take place, this is why Maria was so frustrated, academics and activists did not react, they did not understand, or they were too preoccupied to understand, to evaluate or judge: their judging bodies stayed untouched, unaffected.

Probably the most interesting formulation of fascism Bataille provides comes from *Blue of Noon*, a novel written in the first half of the ‘30s.²¹³ Here Bataille stages himself, in the role of Henri Troppmann, in an almost autobiographical account. The figure of the ugly Lazare has been identified with Simone Weil, with whom Bataille was acquainted at the time he was writing the novel. Troppmann/Bataille, who narrates in first person, appears in different European cities, from London to Paris, Barcelona and Frankfurt. Three women come into contact with the impotent Troppmann (less-than-a-man): the rich, beautiful and licentious Dorothea (Dirty), the ugly, poor, communist and unshakable Lazare, and the sensitive, fragile and bourgeois Xenie. Three stereotypes of women: representatives of the three classes, lower, middle and upper class; of three political regimes, fascism, communism and democracy (three different bodies, a fascist BwO, a suicidal BwO, a body with its organs, and the possibility of an “other” BwO).

²¹³ Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, *op. cit.*

What Bataille does in the novel is to constantly question these roles, exposing them to a turmoil of affects.

It is this affective turmoil that, in its theatricality, Bataille offers here as a doubling of fascism. Fascism appears in its obscenity at the end of the novel, when Troppmann remains alone outside Frankfurt's main train station, Dirty having departed, and sees the spectacle of an army of Nazi children, "hateful automaton", "ferociously" playing drums and fifes in the rain, at night. "From the station entrance I saw in the distance, at the far end of a vast square, a well-lighted stage and, on the tiers of the stage, a cortege of uniformed musicians. The sound was magnificent, ear-rending in its exultation. I was so surprised I immediately stopped crying. I no longer felt like going to the toilet. [...]

As they faced the vast, empty, rain-drenched square and played for occasional passers-by, all these Nazi boys (some of them were blond, with doll-like faces) seemed, in their stick life stiffness, to be possessed by some cataclysmic exultation. In front of them, their leader - a degenerately skinny kid with the sulky face of a fish - kept time with a long drum major's stick. He held this stick obscenely erect, with the knob at his crotch; it then looked like a monstrous monkey's penis that had been decorated with braids of coloured cord. Like a dirty little brute, he would then jerk the stick level with his mouth; from crotch to mouth, from mouth to crotch, each rise and fall jerking to a grinding salvo from the drums."²¹⁴ Fascism presents itself as a theatrical performance, a performance in an open-air theatre. After a long representation of characters that lose or change their features, becoming mad, becoming fearless, becoming dirty, there appears a group of individuals who are not characterized, who form a fascist community, the fusion of a whole body "affectively" united. The young Nazis play without a public, in the rainy night. The obscenity of this fascist body culminates in its "head", in the leader that shouts orders and handles the drum major's stick with a gesture that simulates a phallic erection. The whole scene works as a "mechanism", says Bataille, as a machine that invites war and murder. The roll of the drums is a call for the burst of artillery. The affectivity unchained by this spectacle is employed straight away for a very specific use, to incite a desire for death. Bataille/Troppmann has an immediate bodily reaction: he stops crying, he doesn't need the toilet anymore. The spectacle of the fascist parade immediately affects his body, it regulates it: no more fluid discharges, his body dries up.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 125-126

Bataille doubles this fascist use of affects, exemplified in the last two pages of the book, throughout the rest of the novel. He counters the rigidly structured band resembling a parade of soldiers with different kinds of bodily ruptures undermining the coherence of the characters. Already the introduction presents a ceaseless shattering of the bodies of the two protagonists: they keep crying without reason, they piss on themselves, they try to fuck on a dirty floor surrounded by rats, they laugh hysterically, they vomit, they open wounds on their bodies... nothing makes sense, these actions and reaction are not provoked by any apparent cause. “Everything was false, even my suffering. I started crying again without restraint: sobs that had no sense.”²¹⁵ There is no sense to this crying, and no sadness attached to it, no identifiable human affection. Suffering is “false”, Bataille suffers, but this is a performance where the body gets out of control. The characters play, and often admit that it is a “comedy”, but this is a comedy that exceeds their intentions, a comedy that, despite a thin plot and despite the indication of a setting, has no reason; it does not follow, in the sobbing movements of its actors, a logic of cause and effect, the trajectory of a development towards an end (the novel ends where it should begin).

Everything is exaggerated here, always on the verge of the ridiculous. Nothing is explicitly ridiculous, nothing is here to make you laugh, but the behaviours of the characters, or better, their gestures and movements (they are not coherent enough to be defined as behaviours), exceed the characters themselves to an unreasonable and laughable extent. This affective excess, this exaggeration, does not reinforce characters and typological roles, it cracks them, as it cracks already the band of fascist children, where the ridiculous creeps up in a barely perceptible way.

But these broken characters are still the unquestionable protagonists of the novel. The setting is minimally sketched, consistent enough for the players to be shaken. The focus is on their bodies, even when the protagonist becomes the blue of noon, the starred sky, shining as a pool of blood. This is Bataille’s activism: affective commotions are set free, unhooked from any logic, they are tools of an activism that has no ends, of an affective cracking of the body that continually propagates, affecting its surroundings in turn. This idea of propagation, of contagion, is also prominent within the writings of Acephale and the *College de Sociologie*. Affective uproars are instigated by someone and propagate disorder. Fascism organizes them rigidly, it contains them in an extremely stratified

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p 20

system of annihilation, which has the capacity of extending itself under a relative control. *Blue of Noon* both shows the possibility of an affective surging that disperses bodies outside of the control of a hierarchical structure, and prepares, through a text, the risk of an affective contagion that moves not only from the characters to the setting but also towards the spectators, the readers.

In *Blue of Noon* the narrated context does not matter so much in itself, what matters is the filth of the bodies, their crying and collapsing: if there is change, this happens through bodies, it is barely traceable through the characters.

Troppmann and Dirty are in London in a room at the Savoy. Not much happens. Dirty is from the beginning half naked and wide-open, elusive. Troppmann follows her, with his idleness and mediocrity, he is certainly not a man of action, he is even sexually impotent with Dirty; he often lets himself be carried away by contingent encounters and different situations.

Troppmann is in Paris, he meets with Lazare. Lazare, the communist activist, is impermeable to Troppmann's attempts of affective corruptions (he tells her the episode of himself masturbating in front of his dead mother: Troppmann does with Lazare what Bataille does to the reader, here and in other places). In turn it is Troppmann who becomes stricken by Lazare's deathly smell: "I would have killed her. The thought that perhaps I loved Lazare drew a shout from me that was lost in the hubbub. I felt capable of biting myself. I was obsessed by the revolver, by the need to shoot, to empty the chamber - into her belly, into her ... As though I were tumbling through space and making silly gestures, the way we fire ineffectual shots in dreams. I had had enough. To compose myself, I had to make a great effort. I told Michel, 'Lazare revolts me so much that it scares me.'"²¹⁶

Troppmann gets sick (closer to death), Xenie takes care of him, not much happens here either, sickness becomes an occurrence to variate the intensity, the wringing of the body, the possibility of an affective contagion. The bourgeois and mediocre Xenie is drawn into filth, he gets naked and sings, undone by the provocation of the exposed

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p 75

nakedness of her own body: “She was so unsettled by love and the sense of her nakedness that her voice shrank in her throat.”²¹⁷

Troppmann is in Barcelona, at the eve of the civil war, and even this event seems not to matter so much in itself, it works in conjunction with the characters that act at the forefront. The civil war, as Troppmann’s sickness before, offers a different occasion for a contact amongst the characters, for other affective storms, for more differentiations of intensity. Lazare’s thirst for her own suffering, death and sacrifice outbursts, shaking the inflexibility of her identity: “You don’t know her! She asked me to drive pins into her skin! You don’t know her! She is unbearable...”. Xenie is sent out of her mind, her bourgeois constrictions disbanded.

Troppmann travels with Dirty across Nazi Germany, they have sex in a cemetery. Dirty, now weak and forceless, will probably yield to Nazism as a fearful way of mastering unbearable affective intensities: Henri/Georges takes leave from her and this solution, as he previously distanced himself from Lazare’s communist solution. The characters, naked and exposed, are not changing the course of history (Lazare, for example, is “respected” by the Spanish workers but they finally exclude her from the fight), they are not changing the self into another self, a stronger self or a better self, but through a “contagion” amongst them and with the context, something all around starts changing, something difficult to narrate and account for.

Blue of Noon doubles fascism, and at times it could be taken as a double of a novel like *Le Feu Follet* by Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, who soon after writing it will start promoting fascism in France.²¹⁸ The two novels could be said to share a discontent with bourgeois society, but Bataille radically and repeatedly breaks through the daily nauseating illness that will make Drieu La Rochelle look for institutional answers.

Blue of Noon can be also seen as a doubling of Ignatius of Loyola’s *Diario espiritual*, disseminated, soaked by the tears that the Jesuit diligently ordered into a written archive.²¹⁹ Ignatius of Loyola tries to control affects through writing, organizing his experience into a form of testimony. Bataille, who was reading the Jesuit and will use

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p 66

²¹⁸ Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *The Fire Within*, Knopf, 1965

²¹⁹ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, “The Spiritual Diary”, in *Personal Writings*, Penguin, 2005, pp 67-111.

his writings to prepare the *Summa Atheologica*, attempts not a documentation of affective breakages, but a re-presentation of mechanisms that incite them.

Blue of Noon swerves from party politics, not only from fascism, but from everything that gets constituted through a party, a political role or identity. Lazare plays the part of the activist, she fights for a cause, for the communist cause, on the side of the exploited. She incarnates Politics, with her unshakable rationality, completely in control, entirely insensitive to the “corruption” of affects. Lazare does not understand or listen to Troppmann’s ravings, and Troppmann gets sick by listening to Lazare, even more so to her stepfather, the philosophy teacher, with his empty blather on politics: “I was sick at the time, and half out of my mind; I wouldn’t have been surprised if, instead of speaking, he had let his mouth hang open - I imagined him letting the drool run into his beard without a word.” Bataille’s description of the communist philosophy teacher resembles that of Landru, or of a zombie in a horror film: “I was overwhelmed by his beard, by the dirty look of his skin, by his tripe-coloured lips that were enunciating so well, while his large hands rose up to underscore his sentences.”²²⁰

Lazare is a woman of unshakeable faith, Troppmann is “only able to lose his mind”.²²¹ But even Lazare/the political activist gets doubled here. Cold and insensitive as death, smelling like a rotting Lazarus, Lazare will be drawn more decisively towards death, up to the point at which her occupation as an activist will fail: she will not be able to take part in the civil war together with the Spanish workers, her projects proving to be insane and suicidal. The turning point takes place on the seaside, through a sort of substitution of an impossible sexual act, Lazare orders Antonio, the young Spanish worker captivated by the ugly woman, to point his gun at her. Lazare is ridiculously ugly and dirty (“I wondered for a moment if she was not the most human person I had even seen; but she was also a filthy mouse coming forward”), even more ridiculous as a double of Simone Weil, where so many features of her biographical self as a clumsy and mystical kind of activist come close to being anticipated by Bataille here.²²²

²²⁰ Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, op. cit., pp 45-46

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²²² Simone Weil works in a factory to get closer and understand the workers, but gets sick after a few months and has to give this up, she then joins the Spanish Civil War but gets burnt over a cooking fire, she goes to Assisi to recover and experiences religious ecstasy, she joins the resistance but gets tuberculosis in the UK, where she dies because she decides to eat only what she believes French people under the Nazi occupation would eat.



APPENDIX 4: From a conversation across balconies to a rolling parmesan

3 Fascism, microfascism, affective manipulation (part two: Guattari)

“The analysis of fascism is not simply a historian's speciality. What fascism set in motion yesterday continues to proliferate in other forms, within the complex of contemporary social space. [...] Today the productive forces provoke the explosion of traditional human territorialities, because they are capable of liberating the atomic energy of desire. This phenomenon being irreversible, and its revolutionary scope impossible to calculate, the totalitarian-bureaucratic capitalist systems are forced to constantly perfect and miniaturize their repressive machines.”²²³

“Alongside the fascism of the concentration camps, which continue to exist in numerous countries, new forms of molecular fascism are developing: a slow burning fascism in familialism, in school, in racism, in every kind of ghetto, which advantageously makes up for the crematory ovens.”²²⁴

The term “anti-fascism”, “anti-fascist struggle” struck me when I saw it written on a banner at the World Social Forum in London. I think it struck me because I associated it to a tradition of partisan struggle, to a different landscape from that of a sort of international activist fair. Of course I had heard of neo-Nazis, but was this the kind of fascism these people intended to fight against? Was not Fascism, at in least in its horrifying form of a mass movement, gone, a long time ago, was it not something whose historical distance was sanctioned by Hollywood and B movies? Which kind of fascism was this fascism to struggle against supposed to be? I didn't ask, preoccupied as I was in trying to make sense of the Social Forum as a whole, trying to orient myself amongst all those talks, conferences, discussions. In the meantime, at the other end of the hall, the same hall Lucio Fulci used as a setting for one of his early thrillers, Susan Kelly and Laura Cull, armed with blond wigs, were about to perform a re-enactment of Bataille's *The Blue of Noon* that I will never be able to see.²²⁵

²²³ Guattari, “Everybody Wants to Be a Fascist”, in *Chaosology*, Semiotext(e), 2008, pp. 163-164.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p 171

²²⁵ Lucio Fulci, *Una lucertola con la pelle di donna*, Apollo Films, 1971.

As Guattari says in the quotation above, the analysis of fascism cannot be reserved to historians, fascism is not just “historical fascism”, a political movement that collapses with the culmination of the second world war: we need to understand and analyse how fascism has transformed itself after the end of its historical period, how it has been recuperated by capitalism in other forms, how, together with capitalism, it has gone micro, penetrating everyday life, and becoming a better tool for capitalism to repress, control, and manipulate desire in a more economical and reasonable way.

Guattari addresses microfascism extensively in “Everybody Wants to Be a Fascist”, a lecture delivered in Milan in 1973 for the Colloquium “Psychoanalysis and Politics”.²²⁶ He analyses the movement from fascism to microfascism, expressing an urgency to fight fascism today, not as an external enemy, but as something penetrating our bodies, infecting our lives: “the fight against ‘microscopic’ fascism, that which establishes itself in the desiring machines, cannot pass through the mediation of ‘delegates’, of ‘representatives’ of blocks identified once for all. The ‘enemy’ changes features: it can be the ally, the comrade, the one responsible, or ourselves. We can never be sure of not going to the side of a politics of bureaucracy and prestige, of a paranoid interpretation, of an unconscious complicity with constituted powers, of an interiorization of a repression.”²²⁷ With the end of historical fascism, capitalism has recuperated fascism in a sort of domesticated form, from a dangerous and deathly involvement of the masses, to a more controlled and productive involvement at the level of “allies, comrades, ourselves”, beyond political ideologies and right and left divisions. Guattari’s essay helps us understand fascism and microfascism, their relation, and what of (Bataille’s) fascism operates as part of today’s microfascism.

How to cure the fascist? How to cure the fascist body without organs that can erupt in ourselves, in our groups? As Bataille does, Deleuze and Guattari experiment with something like a counter-fascism: even when they apparently do not address fascism, they experiment with it, and make us experiment in turn. As Foucault says, Deleuze and Guattari track down “all varieties of fascism, from the enormous ones that surround and crush us to the petty ones that constitute the tyrannical bitterness of our everyday

226 Guattari has revised this text for the Italian edition of *Molecular Revolution*, and I will use both versions: “Everybody Wants to Be a Fascist”, in *Chaosophy*, *op. cit.*, and “La fine dei feticismi” in *La rivoluzione molecolare*, Einaudi, 1978. “Everybody Wants to Be a Fascist” previously appeared in *Molecular Revolution*, Penguin, 1984, as “The Micro-Politics of Fascism”.

227 Guattari, “La fine dei feticismi” in *La rivoluzione molecolare*, p 7-8: this section does not appear in “Everybody Wants to Be a Fascist”.

lives.”²²⁸ What we get from Deleuze and Guattari is an analysis of the conjunction between fascism and forms of capitalism nearer to us. In comparison, Bataille’s diagnosis could be seen as outdated, but Bataille’s “remedies” can nonetheless be practiced and actualised, freed from a historical context they have in any case always escaped.

Fascism develops a new kind of repression, something which differs from the baton-like repression of a dictatorship. Baton, tortures, “disappearances”... the baton of the police smashing students’ heads across Europe and the world: there are features of this “old style” repression re-emerging today in Western “democracy”, but this is something other than fascism, it is an external form of repression, exercised on our bodies from the outside of our bodies: “After the debacle of 1918 and the crisis of 1929, why is it that German capitalism didn't resort to a simple military dictatorship for support? Why Hitler rather than General von Schleicher? Daniel Guerin says that large capital hesitated to "deprive itself of this incomparable, irreplaceable means of penetrating into all the cells of society, the organization of the fascist masses." [...] A military dictatorship does not draw on libidinal energy in the same way as a fascist dictatorship, even if some of their results may seem identical, and even if they happen to resort to the same kinds of repressive methods, the same tortures, etc.”²²⁹ Fascist repression is more subtle and more effective. It works upon desire as that which gets repressed, distorted: a desire of annihilation.

From a fascist “revolution”, Fascism desired by the masses as an urgency to change, we move to a microfascism penetrating our individual / dividual bodies: “Through all kinds of means - in particular, movies and television - we are led to believe that Nazism was just a bad moment we had to go through, a sort of historical error, but also a beautiful page in history for the good heroes. And besides, was it not touching to see the intertwined flags of capitalism and socialism? We are further led to believe that there were real antagonistic contradictions between the fascist Axis and the Allies. This is a way of concealing the nature of the selection process which was to lead to the elimination of a fascist formula which, after a while, the bourgeoisie finally decided was dangerous.”²³⁰ In a period in which capitalism was undergoing a profound crisis,

²²⁸ Foucault, “Preface” to *Anti-Oedipus*, *op. cit.*, p xiv

²²⁹ Guattari, “Everybody Wants to Be a Fascist”, *op. cit.*, p 165.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 166-167

fascism “worked well” at the beginning, it was something like an extreme remedy, which capitalism, the capitalist bourgeoisie, discarded in its extreme form of a massive mobilisation: the masses had to be mobilized in a different way, through segregation and individuation rather than the dangerous theatrical “orgies” of the fascist parades.

Historical fascism is a machine bringing together Eros and Death, a machine for a collective production of a desire of annihilation. The Nazis, says Guattari, protracted for years a moribund war that was evidently lost already, and this is because death and a deathly desire was at stake in the fascist affective politics. Capitalism had to stop Fascism’s macro annihilation and self-annihilation, making use of its micro potentials: a much safer and more discreet, less evidently theatrical and more economical way of pursuing our “annihilation”, a desire of repression. But, on the side of Fascism, there was from the beginning an “intrinsic bad faith”, which is what made possible, in the long term, the alignment of fascism with capitalism: “By reterritorializing their desire onto a leader, a people, and a race, the masses abolished, by means of a phantasm of catastrophe, a reality which they detested and which the revolutionaries were either unwilling or unable to encroach upon. For the masses, virility, blood, vital space, and death took the place of a socialism that had too much respect for the dominant meanings. And yet, fascism was brought back to these same dominant meanings by a sort of intrinsic bad faith, by a false provocation to the absurd and by a whole theatre of collective hysteria and debility.”²³¹ Fascism connects with a desire for change, with a hatred for capitalism and bourgeois values, with a sense of the unbearable of life, but it does this on the bases of a “false provocation”, through a theatre of bad faith. It is this theatre of bad faith that Bataille doubles with his friends, from a false provocation to another kind of (laughable) false provocation, from bad faith to a demolition of faith.

Fascism shares its totalitarian features with Stalinism, and with the bourgeois democracy of capitalism, which Guattari also defines as totalitarian. “We simply don’t want to miss the impact of this totalitarian machine which never stops modifying and adapting itself to the relationships of force and societal transformations [...] today within political and trade union movements, within groupuscules, in family life, academic life, etc., we are witnessing other fascistizing microcrystallization, which take over from the phylum of the totalitarian machine.”²³² After the second war, the totalitarian machine of

²³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169

²³² *Ibid.*, p 165-6

capitalism becomes “molecularized”, recuperates fascism in its micro form, imposes totalitarianism at a molecular level, at the level of the body, working as a microphysics of power, to use Foucault’s terms. Stalinism, with its “implacable control”, had the tendency to suffocate desire in a rather straightforward way, and soon became an obsolete model, unable to manage affects. Fascism becomes microfascism, a desiring machine that capitalism uses molecularly to “exploit the masses”. Technical machines and economic systems are increasingly deterritorialized, says Guattari, and consequently “the forms of repression are equally incited to become molecularized. A massive repression is no longer enough. Capitalism is obliged to construct and impose models of desire; and its survival depends on its success in bringing about the internationalization of these models by the masses it exploits.”²³³

“We need to go beyond, not to invoke a revolutionary purity, which is totally lost, if it ever existed, but to start from the idea of a multiplicity, of a *polyvocality* of actions. It’s true, I sometimes hold revolutionary speeches, but at the same time I’m a petit bourgeois who works in a psychiatric clinic. I speak of liberation of desire, but in the education of my sons I have also been repressive; I speak of liberation of desire, but with some women I have been jealous and tyrannical; I speak of liberation of the woman but I am sometimes hunted by phantasms of possession. Then, what to do with all this? This is certainly not a critic of Calvinist inspiration, because only at the condition of making operative, of exposing the different elements of a contradiction, we can develop a concatenation, an analytic process showing to what extent I am actually microfascist in some circumstances. Because the question is not to say that I’m not microfascist, but to know to what extent I am microfascist, because I am microfascist as everybody else; what is important is to know where this stops, how this concatenates, how it gets overturned.”²³⁴

“Everybody Wants to Be a Fascist” is not just a lecture on fascism, Guattari talks here about many other things, he goes “off the tracks”, as I might well do myself: “At home, a child ‘off the track’ is put down, and this continues in school, in the barracks, in the factory, in the trade union, and in the party cell. You must always stay ‘on the right track’ and ‘in line’. But by virtue of its very nature, desire always has the tendency to

²³³ *Ibid.* p 175

²³⁴ Felix Guattari, *Desiderio e rivoluzione* (1977 interview with Paolo Bertetto and Franco Berardi), Milano, Squilibri, 1978, pp 25-6.

‘stray away from the subject’, to ‘get off the track’, and to drift from its proper course.[...] For political struggle to coincide with an analysis of desire, you have to be in a position to listen in on whoever is speaking from a position of desire, and above all, ‘off the track’.”²³⁵ This might be read as a form of practical advice, to develop a sensitivity towards a certain kind of listening, following the going off track of desire and giving way to a certain straying.

The “political” challenge is then to reassemble different lines of “going off the track”, allowing for “multiplicity” and “polyvocality” to emerge. Guattari calls “collective enunciation” this assemblage and he makes a distinction between collective and individuated enunciation, where enunciation is more, or something else, than simply the act of uttering words – Guattari speaking in a conference in Milan – and collective enunciation is not or not necessarily “collective” in the sense of the result of a collaboration “authored” by a group of people. Collective enunciation is “an attempt to create opportunities of conjunction between different semiotic components, in order that they not be systematically broken, linearized, separated.”²³⁶ Collective enunciation could perhaps be this paper Guattari presents, a going “off the track”, not as a property of or something proper to an individual or collective subject that enunciates it, but as a “straying from the subject”, straying from its coherence and unity.

“Gradually, as I go on with this statement, a paradox thrusts itself on me: how is it conceivable to speak of these kinds of collective dispositions of enunciations while seated on a chair facing a group that is soberly arranged in a room? In reality, everything I say tends to establish that a true political analysis cannot arise from an individuated enunciation, especially when it is the act of a lecturer, who is not acquainted with the problems of his audience! An individual statement has no bearing except to the extent that it can enter into conjunction with collective set-ups which already function effectively; for example which are already engaged in real social struggles. If this doesn’t happen who are you speaking to? To a universal interlocutor? To someone who already knows the codes, the meanings, and all their possible combinations?”²³⁷

²³⁵ Guattari, “Everybody Wants to be a Fascist”, *op. cit.*, p 160

²³⁶ Guattari, “Desire is Power, Power is Desire”, in *Chaosophy*, *op. cit.*, pp 287-8.

²³⁷ Guattari, “Everybody Wants to be a Fascist”, *op. cit.*, pp 160-1

To “cure” the cancerous body desire needs to become “productive”, from a deathly and centripetal (paranoid) desire to a desire moving everywhere, engaging with others, other singularities (how is what I am saying going to clasp onto you?). Movements, gestures, sounds are performed again, the cure is a repetition, a doubling. The cure is already the (schizo)analysis. Guattari speaks of a political “analysis” which, by coming together with that which analyses, becomes a sort of performance, a “saying that is also doing”: “Henceforth, the analysis is not something which takes place after the terms and relationship of force are established, or after the *socius* is crystallized into various closed instances which remain opaque to one another: it participates in this very crystallization. The analysis becomes immediately political. ‘When saying is doing’. The division of labour between the specialists of saying and the specialists of doing ceases.”²³⁸ This “participation in a crystallization” concerns a repetition that does not fall chronologically after (something is done and I do it again), but is a performing, thinking, doing, analysing, acting differently that has always already begun.

How to cure the fascist. A beautiful example of this “analysis”, which Deleuze and Guattari often call “schizoanalysis”, comes from a 1975 interview with *Liberation* on Terence Malick’s *Badlands*. This analysis unpacks the film and brings some of its elements together again, forming a different configuration. It creates a case for a “schizo-desire”, distinguishing between “the infrapersonal level of desiring-machines – how the world is organized with systems of intensities, of colours, impressions, appearances – and the suprapersonal level, in direct contact with the *socius*.”²³⁹ Two levels are intertwined, the revolutionary and the reactionary, the schizo and the paranoid, but they do not exclude or neutralize each other, “schizo or paranoid is of little importance; he is reactionary as soon as he enters the field of dominant signification”.²⁴⁰ We can still read the revolutionary, even if it comes together with the reactionary. Schizoanalysis performs this kind of unpacking: it is not about individuals, the protagonist of the film as good or bad. It is not a matter of deciding who is the good schizo and who is paranoid/fascist, in order to get rid of the bad and to suffocate the fascist, but of recomposing the schizo that is already within us, making something with it, activating it.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p 160

²³⁹ Guattari, “Cinema Fou”, in *Chaosophy, op. cit.*, p 248

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

This reading, this analysis, is saying but also doing: I reconnect bits and pieces without reconstructing a narrative centred on its protagonists, following the broken paths of schizo-desire, rehearsing asignifying connections, beyond and beside significations (beyond the meaning of the film, of my life, of myself as a character). “One cannot say that he is reactionary. The paranoiac-libido is so entangled in its molecular elements with the schizo-libido that it makes no sense to divide people into good or bad, reactionary or progressive. Kids in neighbourhood gangs who wear Hitlerian insignia on their back are not fascist; fascist are White Suprematists, they are structured organisms.”²⁴¹ Fascists are organized racists, but the threshold of engagement is up to us, the analysis/cure never goes in a single direction, we “cure” by engaging with something and someone, it’s about the process and not about an us and them. Microfascism is in all of us, the challenge is to sense the possibility of a collective becoming-schizo, not despite but across microfascism itself.

Microfascism and the going off the track of the schizo are not on opposite sides, as we understand from Guattari’s reading of *Badlands*. They may in fact be very close: (micro)fascism is a way of dealing with a compulsion to change life and create a new form of life, it has a revolutionary potential, but this potential gets immediately regimented. This is why microfascism is useful for capitalism: it produces desire, responding to a desubjectivation and deterritorialization that capitalism needs, but at the same time it controls and represses desire, it rigidly encloses it, bending it onto territorial and identitarian fixations predicated upon a sense of possession and property (this is my body, this is my land...) that fascism shares with capitalism. Hence microfascism – and less so institutionalized fascism – might offer anchoring points for a turning, doubling, schizoanalytical repetition that would make a “schizo-desire” flow (the closeness of the tree BwO: the danger for our body to become cancerous gets reversed into the possibility for our cancerous body to become an “other” body).

An amazing moment takes place at the end of this short interview, when the interviewer shows a copy of *Positif* with a text where Terence Malick analyses his own film in a very different way from Guattari, almost as a psychoanalyst, or a psychologist, describing the two protagonists as “reacting only to what is inside themselves”, as not communicating with the external world, and not understanding what others feel. Guattari is shocked: “There isn’t a sentence where he says the guy is crazy? He doesn’t

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p 254

realize himself? [...] it's really stupid, it's terrible. (He takes *Positif* and glances through it.) This interview is really revolting. Yuk! It makes me puke!”²⁴² Going off the track again, what has this instance to do with fascism and its cure? It indicates the possibility of freedom from the ties with a father and an author, as possessor of a property.

Microfascism works as a “semiotic subjugation of all individuals”: perception, movement in space, singing, dancing, mimicry, caressing, contact, everything that concerns the body, is reduced to a dominant language.²⁴³ “Microfascist contamination” and “semiotic contamination” by capitalism come together, and are inescapable: you can't be immune from them. This is what Guattari tells in his “improvised address” to the 1975 *Schizo-Culture Conference* organized at Columbia University, New York, by Sylvere Lotringer.²⁴⁴ In this intervention Guattari's microfascism gets closer to capitalism and almost loses its specificity: what microfascism and capitalism share is a homologation of forms of life, a suppression of singularity.

Guattari investigates here linguistic and semiotic conceptions underlying formations of power. This is why he talks about a semiotic subjugation which is linked to a “law of writing”. “If I make a gesture, it must relate to a text that says: ‘Is it appropriate to make this gesture at this point?’ If my gesture is incoherent, there will be, as in a computer, some written or digitalized device that will say: ‘This person may be mad, or drugged, perhaps we should call the police, or maybe he is a poet: that individual belongs to a certain society and should be referred to a written text.’”²⁴⁵ Guattari talks of digitalization, of “putting everything into digits”: it is this reduction to a digitalized desire, the individuation of enunciation, that accompanies microfascism today. Microfascism becomes the repression, exclusion, erasure of everything that goes off the track (here the tracks of binary digitalization). “One moves toward a situation where the entirety of complex systems of expression – as in dance, tattoo, mime, etc. – is abandoned for an individuation that implies the position of a speaker and an auditor, such that the only thing that remains of a communication is the transmission of information quantified in ‘bits’. Yet, in another arrangement, the essence of communication is a communication of desire. A child who plays, or a lover who courts someone, does not transmit information, he creates a richly expressive situation in

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p 256

²⁴³ Guattari, “Molecular Revolution” in *Chaosophy*, *op. cit.* pp 278-9

²⁴⁴ Guattari, “Desire is Power, Power is Desire”, in *Chaosophy*, *op. cit.*

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p 282

which a whole series of semiotic components are involved.”²⁴⁶ Guattari provides the example of shopping, where desire is expressed in a way that the system can regain it: desire becomes a linearized desire, quantified in terms of systems of production. Linear, transmittable, quantified, this is desire as capitalism needs it, ready for profit. “Consider what happens in a primitive society when a purchase is made. The purchase is often a body linked to interminable discussions; it is more often like a donation, even though it is presented as an exchange. Today, shopping ideally demands that the salesperson behaves like a computer. Even if the salesperson is someone affable, and displays all the iconic components of seduction, she nonetheless seduces according to a precise code. Her skirt must be a certain length, her smile artificial, etc. the best way for capitalism to insure semiotic subjugation is to encode desire in a linear way, whether in a factory or a bank, capitalism does not want people who bring the totality of what they are, with their desire and their problems. One doesn’t ask them to desire, to be in love, or to be depressed; one asks them to do the work. They must suppress what they feel, what they are, their entire perceptive semiotics, all their problems.”²⁴⁷ Desire must be encoded, subjectivity has to be subjected to a selection process, it is not the totality of what we possibly are that counts, but only what is profitable therein, what can be used by capitalism. Desires and affects are what feed capitalism, but only to the extent that they can be encoded, and this manufacturing of codified (repressed, in the sense of reduced, limited, controlled) desires is the microfascism of today’s capitalism.

And yet, I think that everything might be more complex than this, that the salesman is incited to put much more than a codified smile into the sale, that the seduction of a lover and the seduction of a salesman are often getting closer. It is like the performance of an actor, she knows she is an actor, but she performs as if she does not know it, or not anymore: acting itself, in both cinema and theatre today, is often less codified than before. The distinction Guattari makes between semiotization and a digitalized semiotization, has to be kept, and is possibly even more important today, but we need to think that the digital is not reducible to written communication, and it tends to assume the form of a complex semiotization where much more than an exchange of information takes place. As a consequence, the salesman’s “digitalized” selling takes place on a complex affective stage.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p 283

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p 284

I used to work in a Japanese restaurant in London, and I often had the impression to work in a sort of brothel without sexual intercourse. Waiters and customers: the roles were surely distinct, I had to serve and the customers were there to be served, but everyone, on both sides, behaved often like a seducing prostitute, that was the code of the relationship. “Seduction”, as a reciprocal game, was implicitly included in the price the customers paid and in the wage (or better the tips) of the waiters. We were performing prostitutes or even lovers, sometimes scenes of “jealousy”, that is, complaints, could happen: a lover is expected to deal with the different moods of his partner, some days you feel particularly bad-tempered, and the waiter has to be able to take care of that (of course the other way round does not apply). All this emotional activity went beyond wages and bills: we were all probably so bored (certainly I was), that these games of care and seduction gave us the impression of being somehow alive.

Microfascism of a Japanese restaurant: desire is put at work. It can even be desire invested in the restaurant as a company: we love it, we are proud of being part of this team, we want to communicate this to our customers, we want to provide them with an unforgettable experience... but do we really believe, as waiters, in this bullshit? Or are we just pretending? I understand what Guattari says, and he is right: in the restaurant it is acceptable to flirt and seduce, but only in a certain way, according to an etiquette which is rigid, despite the sense of freedom we might have – eroticism could never be filthy and ridiculous as in Bataille. This is not so different perhaps from the etiquette used outside the restaurant: we train as customers, we train as waiters, and we end up trained also outside our jobs, so that the lovers outside Yo Sushi! might express themselves through codes just as much controlled. Working as a waiter has made me more affable with people, oh yes. I even still enjoy performing with people now, if I’m in the right mood. A battalion of seductive waiters and waitresses: this is not the affective uproar of a Fascist parade, desire is lazily squeezed out of us. It becomes excitement when finally the clients leave and we work together as fast as we can to close the restaurant and go away. Instead of turning myself into a codified self, into a sort of automaton, this incitement to seduce, be nice, take care, could open possibilities that escape the capitalization of affects into labour.

To counter microfascism, semiotic subjugation, individuation of enunciations, where the individual is “coiled up in himself, his family, his sexuality”, Guattari talks of collective enunciations. “In the previous talk, the person who was ‘discoursing’ came to

me and said: 'If I spoke a long time, all at once, it was because I felt inhibited, because I could not speak.' We did not function as a collective arrangement of enunciation; I didn't manage to relate my own inhibition about hearing him with his inhibition about speaking. It always comes back to the idea that if you abandon the discourse of reason, you fall into the black night of passions, of murder, and the dissolution of all social life. But I think the discourse of reason is the pathology, the morbid discourse par excellence. Simply look at what happens in the world, because it is the discourse of reason that is in power everywhere. [...] The question then is not semiotic, or linguistic, or psychoanalytic – it is political.”²⁴⁸

In this passage, the opposition between reason and passion sounds a bit too neat. Politics with the capital P has become more and more “affective” anyway, it has been playing more and more away from traditional, serious and rational political codes. On one side there is Comandante Marcos with his beautiful speeches that sound like poetry, but on the other there is someone like Berlusconi, who offers an impressive example of a “new” way of making Politics, which is not so much a transgression of the old codes, but a practice of a different “language” that comes from the same telenovelas his TVs have been broadcasting for decades before his coming to power. Berlusconi singing love songs to the Italians, Berlusconi seducing young earthquake victims in Abruzzo, “papi” Berlusconi giving suggestions about the intimate hygiene and sexual life of his *veline*. But of course Berlusconi is just an example, it should be mentioned here at least his friend Gaddafi who, with his face-lifts, his cool strike-a-pose, his thousand female bodyguards, appears as the natural living heir (not for much longer though) of the recently deceased Michael Jackson. But there is passion and passion, as Guattari says. “Dear papi...”: this is a passion of a 200 words vocabulary. Berlusconi's fixed set of “passionate” repertoires: he covers the whole range of emotions, from A to B. There is a syntax of sentiments which is strictly under control, a syntax that Berlusconi learns, together with us, from his telenovelas, a syntax restricted to marketed emotions.

Also, from a Japanese restaurant to a Guest Lecture at Goldsmiths, Guattari provides here an example of a failure, in a lecture theatre, to create opportunities of conjunctions between different semiotic components, to undermine their separation. “It is simply this: either there will be other types of arrangement of enunciation in which the person will be a small element juxtaposed to something else (beginning with me), or there will be

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p 288

nothing: the development of fascism in continuous linear fashion is taking place in many countries, and there you have it.”²⁴⁹ We could talk of a development of fascism in academia, where you have to conform to that way of talking, otherwise you will sound stupid, ridiculous or mad. Microfascism is also individuation, separation and suppression, in the framework of a generalized incitement to creativity and originality (the cleanness of academia).

I want to use one more text to push microfascism “off its tracks”, a 1977 interview of Guattari with Bifo, published only in Italian.²⁵⁰ Here Guattari talks of “molecularization” and the difference between molecular revolution and the ecological movement advocating a return to a previous, more natural life: “it’s not enough to think pollution as a result of industrial society at the level of environment: we need to see it also at a subjective level, we need to recognize that pollution exists in the spirit, that nothing escapes to pollution, there is no refuge, neither in transcendental meditation, nor in macrobiotic food. Everyone is polluted not only at the level of one’s body, but also at the level of semiotization. And this implies the issue of a sort of permanent revolution, of a molecular revolution, which would articulate with all the other revolutions – social, ecological, economic – a revolution which would be to some extent a questioning, an almost artificial management of desire.”²⁵¹ Guattari talks here of an “artificial management of desire”, a machinic, molecular organization of desire. To counter microfascism, to “cure” it, we cannot aspire to anything now lost and gone. This is what fascism sets up in the form of theatrical paraphernalia: a (deathly) recuperation of something gone, of a certain mysticism, the myth of a “natural” connection between myself and the land where I was born. The more these myths appear as fantasies today, the more they seem to be used to produce fascist desire (with Lega Nord, Casa Pound and others). This is another aspect of microfascism, to fetishize a purer past that never really took place, at the expense of new cartographies of the future.

Also, to “manage desire artificially” implies that desire is not something “natural”: it is not something that is enough to uncover and to “liberate” in order to get a “better” world, as if desire in itself was a positive force of nature. “I’m not a partisan of pure spontaneity, anarchy, disorder, and free expression of passions in their most violent and

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p 290

²⁵⁰ Guattari, *Desiderio e rivoluzione*, *op. cit.*

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p 56

brutal forms – this does not correspond at all to what I believe is the unconscious. On the contrary, that’s a myth which is always proposed to us by saying: ‘If you like for passions to express themselves then you are promoters of pure violence.’ As if the sense of passion would be violence and disorder.”²⁵² What appeared above as an opposition between affects and reason, is cut across here with the artificiality of desire and everything considered natural, which is also a claim for the possibility of actively making something through it. A “desiring machine” gives the sense of this possibility, of its artificiality, the possibility for desire to be somehow crafted.

This “artificial management of desire” is crucial for “activism” as delineated here. If desire is manipulated by capitalism, and both incited and controlled through microfascism, it can be manipulated by ourselves in turn, and indeed despite our selves, beyond ourselves as rational, willing and dominant subjects manipulating an object.

For Guattari, the task of a manipulation of desire is to break segregation, to incite, create and experiment with different and combined micro-manipulations and desiring practices. To manage desire artificially is to push it further in unforeseeable directions, to break the isolation capitalism imposes, to create breaches for different conjunctions to take place, for desire to recompose itself and to move further. “Then [it] is necessary to take a stance: molecular revolution consists in saying: ‘Good, we’ll construct a model of man, woman, relation, in a completely artificial way.’ In the same way, the 12th century troubadours constructed a model of woman for courtly love, and so all the models of love have been constructed culturally, but without realizing, they were attributed to natural references. These natural models do not exist anymore, if they ever did, and not only it’s a matter of constructing a society in which there will be railways, airplanes, food and pleasurable environment, but also of building a subjectivity, some objects of desire, some sexual objects, aesthetic, and of any other kind.”²⁵³ This is “activism” for Guattari, to create models for desire, to create them as we could create airplanes, as something very tangible and concrete.

Affects can be created, relations can be created, another body, sensibility, perception and desire can be created, another domestic order can be created, a social organization can be created, another way of working can be created, working as acting liberated from

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p 61

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp 56-7

individual interests, profit, accumulation.²⁵⁴ “We can create feelings, relations; literature creates modes of perception of things; music, cinema, put us in a fantastic condition of possible creation. In this sense we are much more inside the machinic values of creation than what all the previous theological systems could imagine to be. People are real creators. And this is our revolution: we don’t want to stand a world of bullshits which always wants to bring us back to the values of nature, to hierarchies, roles, social systems, work and alienation. It’s our desire that brings us at the core of the revolution. Our desire, and here I talk of madness: not individual madness, but collective madness. Human experience is of a madness unheard of! [...] A new society is something to be found, to build. A new order at a domestic level, a new relation with the body, a new relation with sensitivity, with perception, with social organization, a new mode of production, a new relation with the environment are things to be found; a new relation with desires is something to be organized.”²⁵⁵ Our life becomes creation, a creation in its most improbable instances, a “mad” creation, an improbable going forth into the streets, into the squares, and live there together, eating, sleeping, doing, discussing, trembling, taking up a microphone. It is not enough to make sure that all the differences can find a place inside the movement and get respected for what they are, it is not enough to just listen patiently or skilfully to the one who is a bit mad and “goes off the tracks”: we should listen and get affected in such a way that madness becomes collective (15M).

Life erupts, it breaches the individuation of our selves and our groups, the compartmentalization of society, the separation between us and institutions, between experts and common citizens, between the ones who know and lead and the others who have to follow and conform themselves. Life, the biological life of science, what Guattari calls semiotization, becomes a collective creation, a “collective madness”: collective madness as the “cure” to microfascism, as a doubling of a collective madness of another kind – as a lively and collective joy in front of death.



APPENDIX 5: Microfascist theatre: America’s Next Top Model as “semiotic subjugation”

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p 22

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 60-1



APPENDIX 6: Christmas Diary

4 Affective politics as (Italian) soap opera

“Television has replaced a whole series of tasks which were the competence of the educators, of mothers. She is the wet nurse, she has substituted a certain type of relations previously established in the sphere of the semiologies of word. The language produced serves a certain type of formation, the initiation to different mechanisms of production and the social field. TV education shapes the imaginary, imposes characters, stories, phantasms, attitudes, ideals: it imposes an entire micropolitics of relations between men and women, adults and children, races, etc.”²⁵⁶ Guattari

“It’s not very useful to propose laws, to organize political pressures, to affirm ideological principles. It’s much more useful to spread a behaviour, a mythology, an imagination in the everyday life of the city. In such a way the mutation proliferates, it becomes massive, irreversible. When a technology available lets us glimpse social concatenations independent from power, what should be done is not to protest, to claim them or to turn ourselves into their solitary champions. What matters is to spread the word, to make a tool, a method, a style, a fashion available. To have a virus circulating: to contaminate rather than uniting.”²⁵⁷ Bifo

In this section I will deal with the “Italian case”, addressing fascism and microfascism and the role of (Berlusconi’s) TV in the production of a microfascist subjectivity of soap opera. To this end I will use Bifo’s analysis of Berlusconi’s politics as a form of fascism.

Franco Berardi (Bifo)’s *Come si cura il nazi. Iperliberismo e ossessioni identitarie*, written in 1993, has been republished in 2009 with a long new appendix titled “Baroccofascismo”.²⁵⁸ The republishing of this book can be taken as a contribution to a discussion around the term “fascism”, which has made a strong comeback recently in the media, especially in relation with the current state of Italian Politics. In “Baroccofascismo” Bifo expands an analysis already conducted in *Telestreet*, a text

²⁵⁶ Guattari, “Gli asili nido e l’iniziazione” in *La rivoluzione molecolare*, op. cit., p 106 This essay does not appear in *The Molecular Revolution* (op. cit.).

²⁵⁷ Franco Berardi, Marco Jacquemet, Giancarlo Vitali, *Telestreet*, Baldini, Castoldi, Dalai, 2003, pp 49-50

²⁵⁸ In English it would be: “how to cure the nazi – hyper-liberalism and identitarian obsessions”.

which was partly translated into *Ethereal Shadows. Communications and Power in Contemporary Italy*.²⁵⁹

In the introduction Bifo explains the title of the book, how to cure the Nazi, implicitly embracing Deleuze and Guattari's notion of fascism and microfascism, intended as a "cancer", an illness of the body. Fascism is not to be fought against, it has to be cured, says Bifo: it is an illness inside every one of us, and its curing process will never end. As often in Bifo, there is a "humanization" of what for Deleuze and Guattari takes place at a molecular level: "Illness is at work in Potency in our suffering, in our fear, in our unconscious. I would say that the illness called fascism is first of all a particular modality of managing and manifest (aggressively) suffering and fear."²⁶⁰ Suffering and fear are the human feelings that, in a more widespread and popular understanding of it, feed fascism. As Bifo indicates in the subtitle, the way fascism deals with suffering and fear is through "identitary obsessions". Lega Nord has been playing for years with this "identitary obsession", and recent legislative measures like Pacchetto Sicurezza have been juridically formalized, reinstating organizations created by historic Fascism like the "ronde", paramilitary patrols of voluntary citizens. As part of Pacchetto Sicurezza there are specific laws that can be defined as "racial" because they involve racial discrimination, for instance, for an identical offence, a non-European citizen will get a heavier punishment. Also, Pacchetto Sicurezza enforces discrimination by obliging doctors to denounce "illegal" migrants (and in order to avoid the hospital and a possible repatriation migrants died already before the Pacchetto was formalized).²⁶¹

Bifo's conception of fascism, with its negativity, suffering and fear, is somehow closer to Bataille than Deleuze and Guattari. From Deleuze and Guattari, Bifo understands fascism as something to be "cured" of, but he stresses the negativity of fascism in such a way that, as for Bataille, this negativity becomes the middle we have to constantly deal with. The difference is that Bifo's negativity comes from his analysis of the contemporary, whilst Bataille's negativity has no foundation, it is not analysed and explained. Bifo seems to be more preoccupied to read and analyse this negativity, fear,

²⁵⁹ Franco Berardi, Marco Jacquemet, Giancarlo Vitali, *Ethereal Shadows*, Autonomedia, 2007. When possible I will use the English translation.

²⁶⁰ Berardi, *Come si cura il nazi*, *op. cit.*, p 18

²⁶¹ http://www.interno.gov.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/sezioni/sala_stampa/speciali/Pacchetto_sicurezza/index_2.html

paranoia, depression, and all the pathologies of semiocapitalism, whilst Bataille engages directly with their transformations.

In the preface to the second edition, Bifo, following Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, bases his definition of fascism on Wilhelm Reich's "psychic and affective" studies. He also points out their limits. "Wilhelm Reich thought the cause of fascism was the stiffening of the armour of the character which impedes an orgasmic discharge."²⁶² Bifo intends to integrate Reich's Freudo-Marxist approach with a contemporary analysis of capitalism as "hyper-liberalism" (once again taken from the subtitle). "The contraction of the social musculature – an effect of hyper-working, competition, acquisitive tension – it's the real cause of fascism."²⁶³ Contemporary capitalism is "immaterial", based more on digitalized financial speculation, and less on specific productive competencies. This hyper-liberal capitalism bears a new (fascist) politics based not on rational thought but on "aesthetic, psychological, contextual values". Reich himself, as quoted by Bifo, underlines how historical fascism was feeding itself from an incitement of emotions rather than from an objective communication: "Since national-socialism is an elementary movement, it cannot be attacked by arguments. Arguments would be effective only if the movement would have developed through arguments. The national-socialist speeches distinguished themselves for the ability through which they triggered the feelings of the individuals of the mass and for the ability through which they avoided as far as possible every argumentative objection."²⁶⁴ It is the theatrical paraphernalia of fascism that make this kind of (affective more than rational) "communication" possible. In similar terms Bifo describes Berlusconi's politics as paradigmatic of today's hyper-liberalism.

"Baroccofascismo" is the term Bifo uses to define this new politics based on affective communication rather than critical thought. Bifo constructs an argument alongside an opposition between Nordic Calvinism and Mediterranean Counterreformation, between yesterday's capitalism based on rational productive competency, and today's capitalism as immaterial and affective, based on financial speculations; an opposition between a Calvinist individualism responsible to the community, and a baroque convergence of politics and economy with corruption and crime (for Bifo the Mediterranean spirit of the

²⁶² Berardi, *Come si cura il nazi*, *op. cit.*, p 12

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p 46

Lazzaroni, resistant to capitalism until the industrial occupations in the 1970s, has been today appropriated by capitalism itself and turned into mafioso delinquency); an opposition between an intelligible form of communication and the emotional involvement of a public - involvement that politics shares today with advertising; an opposition between traditional liberalism and a neo-liberalism, or hyper-liberalism, begun in the 80s, which creates an alliance with all sorts of reactionary forces, *privatizes* the State and puts it at the service of family interests.

Bifo reads “baroccofascismo” from the perspective of language. He stages an opposition between the rational and the affective: emotions are important for this new fascism as the vehicle for an affective language where the public is a spectator, the spectator of a TV advert. “Which country better than this, the country of the *commedia dell’arte*, can insert itself in a productive system based on chatter, spectacle, exhibition?”²⁶⁵ Bifo makes a paradigmatic case out of Italian contemporary politics, Italy becomes again a laboratory for both revolution and reaction, as it was in the 1970s. What is paradigmatic about Italy today is not just chatter, spectacle and exhibition, but also delinquency and corruption at the core of economy and politics. This is also Saviano’s argument in *Gomorra*: this aspect of Bifo’s analysis could be integrated with Saviano’s positioning of violence, delinquency and corruption at the core of today’s globalized economy, and not at its margins.²⁶⁶

I focus the analysis on Italy here not so much because of the paradigmatic situation of Italian politics today, but partly because “Italian” material is more directly available to me, in the form of conversations, impressions, sensations. Bifo traces a continuity between (Italian) *commedia dell’arte*, (Italian) television, and (Italian) contemporary politics. Contemporary politics is based, like television, on “chatter”, on “the proliferation of chatter, the irrelevance of opinions and discourses, the becoming banal and ridiculous of dissent and, more in general, of thought”.²⁶⁷ Bifo makes an equation between the public of TV programs and the public of Politics, as a public that politicians communicate with.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p 100

²⁶⁶ Saviano, *Gomorra*, Mondadori, 2006

²⁶⁷ Berardi, *Come si cura il nazi*, op. cit., p 95

I would say that it is not just through verbal language and communication that the continuity between the televisual and the political takes place. There is no opposition between a fascist politics of discursive repression yesterday and a fascist politics of empty, chattering discourse today, as Bifo seems to imply. It is at a micro level that politics operates, and it is at the level of semiotization that television has an impact on its “public”, that is, at the level of subjectivation. “The majority of Italian voters grew up as television watchers in the age when the television became the primary vehicle of informality, of vulgar and licentious allusion, of ambiguous and aggressive language. For this reason, they were spontaneously attuned not only to Berlusconi’s language, to his words and gestures, but also to his disdain for rules in the name of a spontaneous energy that the rules should not curb.”²⁶⁸ So, it’s not just a matter of human language, language as the classical tool for politics, there is more at stake. Bifo talks of a “spontaneous energy” that rules cannot restrain, but I find it difficult to associate Berlusconi with informality and spontaneity. This is the theatre of Berlusconi, a codified theatre, a *commedia dell’arte*, what appears to be a spontaneous energy, a defiance of the rules, but is in fact ready made, purposeful, steadily functional. It is televisual and microfascist: beyond its liberating appearance, stratifications and codifications are at work. All this is not far away from historical fascism: the incitement of a desire that is deathly inasmuch as it implies rigidity and control (but, if we compare it with the Italian crowds in the ‘30s, today Berlusconi’s crowds are to a large extent paid to be there and appear rejoicing).

“[In the ‘80s] The city themselves changed shape: people abandoned the streets and piazzas and stayed home in the evening. The urban landscape evoked fear and sadness. Social anxiety spread with heroin abuse. Berlusconi’s television fed into this melancholization of the urban environment: ‘Torna a casa in tutta fretta c’e’ Canale 5 che ti aspetta’ [‘Hurry, hurry home, Channel 5 is waiting for you’] was one slogan of the new television networks launched by the enterprising Milanese lawyer. [...] The ideological and communicative style that we associate with Berlusconi was shaped during these years. While Italian society was overwhelmed by anxiety, fear and depression, and while the Left insisted on imposing sacrifices upon the working class in order to curb inflation and lift the country out of recession, a new socio-political configuration emerged based on superficial optimism and competitive individualism.

²⁶⁸ Berardi, Jacquemet, Vitali, *Ethereal Shadows*, op. cit., p 68

[...] For fifteen years they locked people in their homes to watch billions of hours of television, while boasting that this was the best of all possible worlds.”²⁶⁹

Bifo says it, if not explicitly: Berlusconi has prepared his electorate through television, through his channels. But this preparation was not an addiction to the same empty chatter populating politicians’ discourses, as Bifo says. It was a sentimental education, an affective normalization and individualization of subjectivity. The protagonist of this process is not so much advertising, but something like the soap opera *Dallas*, which Bifo relates to Berlusconi, comparing Berlusconi with JR: the rich and fascinating manager/delinquent, who seduces Italian TV spectators/voters.²⁷⁰ *Dallas* was the first of many American soap operas bought by Berlusconi’s television channels. It is not that the Italians subconsciously identified JR with Berlusconi: there is more to it, they learned (and of course not only the Italians) to feel and perform their lives like a soap opera. From commedia dell’arte to a soap opera, this is the contemporary shift affecting subjectivity (from Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education* to *Dallas*).

Bifo explains the popularity of Berlusconi’s politics opposed as it is to the old politics of both left and right-wing conservative politicians. Simplifying Bifo’s argument, Berlusconi, with all his ridiculous nonsense and contradictions, reveals that the serious talking of the other politicians is as empty as his own. Chatter for chatter, many Italians prefer to have fun with Berlusconi rather than be bored listening to “proper” politicians whose words are empty and ineffective anyway. All this makes sense, but with this analysis Politics tends to be reduced to a linguistic communication between politicians and their electorate.

With Berlusconi, the passage from the advertising expert to the politician comes almost naturally: “Berlusconi has profoundly assimilated the logic of advertising, and has transferred into political communication the style and techniques of that language. [...] critical thinking can do nothing against the dominant imagery in the video electronic epoch. The dominant imagery can be deconstructed only in mythopoeic ways, not through a critical reestablishment of an original truth. There is no original truth in the projected world of advertising and TV communication.”²⁷¹ With his apocalyptic

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 28-29

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p 10

²⁷¹ Berardi, *Come si cura il nazi*, *op. cit.*, p 121

radicalism, Bifo seems to tell us that there is no space for critical thinking today, in the time of electronic (video)communication. But critical thinking does not need to be funded on “original truths”, criticality can unfold through bodies, movements, gestures, desires, intensities, affections.

I would not make a clear-cut distinction between Italian politicians who base their politics on serious critical thinking, and Berlusconi who openly uses the language of advertising, as a language that does not function according to a logic of verifiability. The distinction we could make is by saying that Berlusconi is a better performer than his adversaries. Berlusconi has been feeding the Italians with soap operas and TV shows, not only with “tits and bums” as it is commonly said, but also with a certain way of feeling, a certain way of expressing emotions, a certain way of relating with the self and the others, with friends, families, partners, colleagues. Mediaset has been first of all a school for sentimental education. When I was a child people used to say that the great “gift” of State television (RAI) was the unification of the Italians, that through TV everyone could learn to speak Italian instead of the regional dialect: the educational role of public TV was strongly promoted and perceived, and RAI even used to broadcast lessons in different disciplines, like mathematics or geography, for the Italians who had no access previously to school education. Now this educational task of television is commonly considered lost, disappeared amongst all those tits and bums, but I would argue instead that it has shifted, from the task of a linguistic and cultural homogenization (the disappearance of dialects for instance), to a sentimental homogenization. Berlusconi’s TV turns affect into feeling, and feeds its public with a diet of emotions. Speak more and feel more, express your feelings and communicate, here is where you learn how to do it. I am talking about Italian TV, but of course it is everywhere that television works as a school to feel, and to dress, to behave, to walk down the street, to look at your partner in an intense affectionate way.

There is a continuity between Dallas and Berlusconi, between the success of American soap operas and “Sua Emittenza”. There is no interruption between the soap opera I watch and my life, as there is no interruption between my life and Berlusconi’s soap opera. It is not that I identify Berlusconi with JR and hence admire him, it is rather that Berlusconi is the protagonist of a soap opera that we do not only watch on a TV monitor. It is a soap opera that we live ourselves, as every soap opera. And in comparison with Berlusconi his adversaries look often like extras, walk-ons, or those

characters that appear for just one episode. If they act for a bit longer, in comparison with Berlusconi they are boring, boring like a mortadella. Berlusconi sings a love song, Berlusconi cuts a poor figure in front of the European Community with a racist comment, he builds a huge and tacky mausoleum for himself, he is embarrassing and outrageous, he insults some other politician, he protects Italy from communism, he signs a contract with the Italians on TV, he gets angry with journalists, he gets more and more rich, he shouts, he smiles, he (tries to) fuck the *veline*, he writes his biography and has it posted to every Italian family in order to introduce himself as a new character for an Italian soap opera, he is outrageously ignorant, he gets a hair transplant, he doesn't give a shit, he deals with outlaws and Mafiosi, he tells a joke about the Holocaust, he gets rid of his enemies, he tries to seduce every cute young woman around him, he always gets away with everything, he doesn't fear the law or the magistrates, his wife finally breaks up with him, he turns his villa into a brothel for other politicians and friends, he has another face-lift, he envies Barak Obama's tan... Nanni Moretti said just before the 2006 election, whilst presenting *Il caimano*, that Berlusconi had won anyway, no matter the electoral result, Berlusconi has irreparably changed the Italians, and this is his victory: with the last scene of *Il caimano*, after more than an hour of a romantic comedy, Moretti as Berlusconi leaves a law court in flames, and in such a way he burns away Berlusconi's interminable soap opera, all the episodes listed above, and an unspeakable horror breaks out. (Berlusconi's) television might be outdated today as a means of communication, but its effects on today's subjectivity are acute and they might be such for some time to come after its disappearance.

A soap opera is different from other TV programs and different from films, even when they are produced for TV broadcasting, because it is lifelong, it stays with us for the length of a life, for a very long time, we get accustomed to it and its characters, we get familiar with them, day after day, every day. The soap opera domesticity becomes our domesticity (Berlusconi's domesticity, *In Bed with Berlusconi*...). The house is often the privileged setting of a soap opera, the house, the bar, the office, the restaurant, the usual four walls around us. Soap opera is what gets closest to our everyday life, to our everyday gestures, to our everyday feelings and our daily conducts and behaviours. Soap opera is a dramatization of our everyday life. Love, passions, intrigues, sex and romance, allies and enemies, scandals and betrayals, truth and lies populate our life, as well as Berlusconi's politics. The shift would be from the microfascist performance of a soap opera that incites the drama domesticating it and individuating its actors (from

Berlusconi, to JR, to everyone of us), to a performance that exasperates an affective incoherence that cannot be held together on a TV monitor.

From laughter to laughter, today's Politics is laughable, everyone laughs on both sides of the screen, the politicians and its electorate, Berlusconi the Dwarf (*il nano* is one of his nicknames) is both king and buffoon: he incorporates the role of the one who, through laughter, used to tell a truth other than that of the king (Sabina Guzzanti, the buffoonish alter-ego of Berlusconi, has been censored and banned from public and private television since the first episode of *Raiot*, 2003). Watching Marco Travaglio's *Promemoria* (2009), a theatrical performance where the journalist reads an endless account of Craxi, Berlusconi, and Co.'s appalling crimes, shows how Politics, before being an all encompassing criminal enterprise, has become a laughing machine: Travaglio's public laughs even when the journalist does not try to be ironic, and this is not a hysterical laughter, a frightened laughter, as would perhaps be expected. It is laughter as a "natural" reaction to a comic spectacle, the laughter of the sit-com spectator. You hear an endless revolting account of crimes, corruption and violence, and you see an amused and entertained public that expresses all the variations of enjoyment, from smiles, to giggles, to open laughter.

Bataille comes back to offer a different modality of laughter, unbounded from a comic register that secures its bourgeois spectators in a comfortable red-velvet armchair: to laugh as a form of activism, to laugh as an alteration of our bodies, as becoming other...

I would say that today the Italian party closest to fascism is Lega Nord – more than Popolo della Libertà' (PdL) and Alleanza Nazionale (AN). Lega Nord can be considered a movement, and not simply a party, on account of the vast number of activities it organizes for and with citizens. Often these are "leisure" activities that are not directly related to the administration of the Party, and thereby mobilize its electorate in different ways. The PdL, and before that Forza Italia, following one of its leader's strongest passions, limited itself to the organization of choirs that sang songs like the recent "hit" *Meno male che Silvio c'è* (luckily there is Silvio). Perhaps we should not forget that Berlusconi is also the president of the Milan football team, but this impact on the desires of the electorate is centralized, organized from above. Lega Nord's activities proliferate in a different way, covering a much wider range, from the annual Miss Padania contest, to a number of parties and events for young people, which often take

place in Lega Nord's youth centres. The flourish of Lega Nord websites (regional websites, websites for youths, for women...), the abundance of amateur videos on Youtube, the broadcasting of Padanian radios and TV are other signs of the ramification of Lega into an everyday (Leghista) life.

Not only does the mobilization of youth relate to the centrality of education for Italian fascism, but also to a very contemporary cultural, economical, political trend, that of participation. Participation here becomes a way of activating an electorate by providing, exactly as happens at Tate and other "contemporary art" contexts, a stage to engage with, rigid enough not to lose control over the participants, and "exciting" enough to give a safe margin of initiative for the users. Participation becomes, here more directly than at Tate, and more than with historical fascism, a way to instigate, direct and use people's desires, to put them productively to work.

Participation functions as part of an economy where much work is put into a capillary outreach, in direct contact with people, and much more returns as free labor. What is striking about Lega Nord today is that is the only Party in Italy that consistently works in face to face contact with citizens, in front of factories, outside supermarkets, as in the old days: talking with people, listening to their complaints, encouraging the Italians in this hard moment of crisis. Lega Nord seems to do what until a few decades ago the Communist Party was doing, or at least it pretends, it pretends to care and it pretends to listen.

A more incisive model of political participation, along the same lines, has been developed by Casa Pound, a "radical right" movement, started in 2003 with the opening of a "social center" and developed in 2008 into Casa Pound Italia, an "association of social promotion".²⁷² As a model of participation this is more incisive because the participant is also a member, there is no separation between a "participating" electorate and the Party organizing participation, an electorate participating in a theatre where the Party takes care of the life of the citizens. At Casa Pound there is not so much "taking care" and "listening", there is active participation, this is an "activist" movement. The campaigns are not much different from those of other movements: "Mutuo sociale"

²⁷² For an analysis of Casa Pound and the "radical right" movements in Italy after the second war see Moyote Project, "Casa Pound and the New Radical Right", *Mute*, Vol 2, NO 16, *Real Life Training*, 2010. http://www.metamute.org/en/content/casa_pound_and_the_new_radical_right_in_italy

aims to guarantee the property of a house to (truly) Italian citizens, “Tempo di essere madri” aims to protect the rights of the (truly) Italian working mothers (“I run because I don’t have time” was the slogan written on the T-shirts of the participants to the marathon organized in 2010 to sustain the campaign). Casa Pound fights for the rights of Italians, addresses real problems, the same problems non-right wing movements address. And let’s not forget that Casa Pound’s first founding action was the occupation of a building in Rome in 2003, and the creation of a “social center”, and this was just the beginning of numerous occupations or attempts at occupation, and consequently of confrontations with the police. Squats, occupations and social centers are not a prerogative of anarchist or left oriented movements and collective anymore. Also Casa Pound’s humanitarian interventions should be mentioned, such as volunteering aid to the victims of the earthquake in Abruzzo, the creation of anti-usury and fiscal assistance offices, a collection of toys donated to the children survived after the killing of Beslan... Casa Pound organizes innumerable leisure activities, we should at least remember the Hockey team of Bolzano (called simply *Wild*), and the 10 groups of mountain climbers (they stick the Casa Pound banners at the top of the mountains). There is also an ecologist group called *La Foresta che Avanza*. Casa Pound has a students’ body called Blocco Studentesco, active in schools and universities (in Bolzano militants of BS recently placed TV monitors in front of schools as a protest against the “damages of MTV culture”). Casa Pound has got a theatre company, a radio, a web TV, and publishes two journals. The money probably comes from the PdL, some of the members of Casa Pound are candidates of Berlusconi’s party. We should also mention the artistic movement of Casa Pound, called “Turbodinamismo”, and how to forget the “squadrisimo mediatico”, squads organizing mass media interventions and disruptions, like the hanging of mannequins outside the banks with placards saying “renting is usury”, or the invasion into the Big Brother house to again protest against the “usury” of renting (was that part of Big Brother itself, was it part of the “reality show”?). There is nothing Casa Pound leaves untouched, all sorts of activities are organized and ordered by the movement. And all this seems to be very creative, and also great fun, like in a proper neoliberal dream!

Much is borrowed by Casa Pound from the tradition of the “left”, starting with the appropriation of the figure of Che Guevara (!) and of leftist militants (Peppino Impastato) and their icons (in 2009 Casa Pound organized a conference dedicated to Che Guevara to launch the publication *The Other Che. Ernesto Guevara, Myth and*

Symbol of the Militant Right). There is something for every taste in this “radical right”, fascism is not bad anymore, it is actually on the side of those heroes who fought for a better world! Action, action, action, this is a lifestyle! If Bataille in the 30s looks at fascism to experiment with a different politics, Casa Pound today looks at anti-capitalist movements to make a politics which has nothing new in it: the movement is hierarchically structured in rigid and controlled ways, a traditionally fascist element of Casa Pound’s organization. Giancarlo Iannone is both President of Casa Pound and leader of Zetazeroalfa, the musical band of reference of Casa Pound, and this is very cool, as with Regan, both President and Hollywood actor at the same time (but let’s not forget that Berlusconi sometimes sings as well). This is the kind of participation Casa Pound puts forward: certainly active, but rigidly controlled. And in a way even more active than in fascist times, where action was channelled towards the war: now it’s a matter of organizing activities every day, it is the apotheosis of an activism of recordable actions. And all the recording of these spectacular activities, the slogans, the symbols, the assimilated heroes, the pictures of Iannone intensely looking towards the future (bold as the Duce but with a thick beard as Bakunin), function like the “theatrical paraphernalia” of historical fascism, as tools to incite desire, a desperate desire for change producing a hyper stratification. Foreigners (and faggots, communists, etc) must certainly be thrown out of this country. But what prevails in Casa Pound, and here Italy seems again to win the first prize of “avant-garde” fascist politics today, is the centrality of something like the sense of a social justice, which appears almost as “prevailing” as the racist, hierarchical, fascist elements of the movements, as if these latter aspects would not be foundational for it (*Italiani brava gente* says the myth of the Italian fascist colonizer). It is this commitment to social justice that explains the success of Casa Pound, the “right” way to direct people from the bourgeoisie to fascism. I don’t personally know members of casa Pound Bolzano, but some friends do, and from what they tell, Casa Pounds manages to take people “off the tracks” and put them onto their own solid tracks.

But let’s go back to party politics and Lega Nord, to make some “visual” analysis by having a look at the recent (2008-2009) production of the Italian Parties, at their electorate campaign adverts, created for TV and internet diffusion. Here we can see how, especially in the case of Lega Nord, the distinction I made above between direct contact and media contact between the Party and the electorate fades away: Lega Nord’s adverts are made not just for people but together with people, and sometimes by people

themselves. In comparison the other adverts are much closer to a washing-up promotion. The Partito Democratico adverts have a clean look, with either professional actors or “pretty” faces, they are light, funny and bright, there is even a series of adverts with an actor who plays Berlusconi as a silly man confronted by common (middle class) people in a sort of comic sketch that exalts their (and the party’s) common sense. The comedy of Politics, as a comedy of sober smiles, is here on display. Di Pietro’s Italia dei Valori offers, according to his line, a sober and low cost advert, attacking Berlusconi’s government and advocating for a clean and clear politics, capitalizing on a feeling of outrage constructed via a journalistic information that Berlusconi’s / public media censor. The PdL uses non-professional actors, plenty of them, often representing a job, from teachers to icecream vendors: the actors sing *Meno male che Silvio c’è*, original lyrics and song. The PD responds with *I am PD*, using the music of *YMCA*, a 1978 song by Village People, and other amusing lyrics such as “Walter yes, Silvio no”, sung by a variety of “common people”. AN has an even more conventional spot with images of Fini and others in a conference.

Lega Nord’s adverts are strikingly different. In *Con la Lega si puo’*, an advert that presents itself as a “self-organized and cost-free electoral message”, different people and workers express their firm desires and concerns in relation to the current state of Italy. The smiley ice-cream vendor that sings a cheerful song celebrating Berlusconi, becomes here a real factory worker fed up and determined to change his situation. No reference is made to any politicians, or to a political party, there is only Lega here, everything else is absent, this is all about real citizens like you and I. Real people are real protagonists and what they say is not simply advertising rhetoric, it is the expression of a strong will that comes from outraged people who are menaced by the incompetence of politicians and by foreigners (migrants), by everything that is “alien” to their land. “I don’t want my idiom, my tradition to be wiped away, I want them for my children...” ... “I want the immediate expulsion of illegal migrants, I want those who come to respect my rules and not impose their own.” There are even two girls talking in front of a Carabinieri van, with a couple of Carabinieri showing their back, as if they were there ready to protect the girls in case some Moroccan rapist would suddenly appear.

In a very different Lega Nord advert of 2006 all we have is a knight, the same Christian “Lombardo” of the party’s logo, with a red Latin cross on white, riding a horse in a

wood. On screen the usual words appear: “respect for the land, tradition, history... honesty, audacity... family, protection, freedom.” The most peculiar aspect of the advert is the soundtrack, which is probably taken from a film like *Braveheart*: “Our enemies wants to take our lives away, but they will never take away our freedom!” There is also another video on Youtube, it is an amateur remake of this official advert. In Youtube one can easily find parodies of famous films and also of electoral adverts (the PdL’s adverts are the most targeted). Often people use the images of a film and recreate the dialogues, sometimes in an Italian dialect, so that you can see, for instance, abridged Trentino versions of *The Lord of the Rings*. I expected a similar parody with this video. A young boy with a helmet, a sword and a mantle walks around a wood. There is no horse, but the words appearing on screen are the same as in the original version, and so is the sound. But there is no parody here, at the end of the video the boy raises the sword and shouts out an appalling cry.

If the other parties’ adverts use cheerful songs and a touch of irony to engage with their electorate of spectators, Lega Nord talks to “real” people, through “real” people, and with an affective intensity produced through a staging of everyday “common people”, based on a common Padanian identity. A more recent advert by Lega is titled *Sono incazzato*, “I’m pissed off”. It also looks like an amateur video, with an unclean and documentary-like aesthetic, alternating black and white with colour. A boy walks around the streets of Milan. He is “pissed off”. “I am pissed off with the politicians because they vomit useless words, because they steal my money to give it to people who don’t do a shit to deserve it,” - images of North Africans chatting on a bench. “I’m pissed off because I’m fed up of being scared of drunk people and criminals, because my girlfriend is terrified of going out in the evening, and rape occurs on a daily basis.” The boy does not speak on screen, the voice is over, and it is panting, out of breath. “My land used to be wonderful and it has been raped, and now it is more fucked than a whore.” – images of migrant prostitutes on avenues. The boy conveys an intense sense of fear and exasperation with his anxious breathing. The music is tense, as in a horror movie. “Milan would be marvellous if there were more Milanese to defend their city, their tradition, their rights.” The last scene shows the possibility for hope, a gathering of Lega Nord “I am part of Lega, because Lega listens to me, because I want to feel part of something, because I want something that is made partly by myself.”

Lega Nord's "soap opera" has the style of a Mel Gibson adventure movie, of historical reconstructions for television, with celebrations of martyrs and heroes, with the individuation of a hero around whom the whole community gets inspired to act bravely. As a RAI production, that is, as publicly funded, Lega Nord has commissioned *Barbarossa*, a film in two versions, for both TV and cinemas, telling the story of Alberto da Giussano, a 12th Century hero who defended Padania with his life. A preview of the film is shown at a Lega meeting: "I am Alberto", says Umberto Bossi, meaning, Alberto is me, not the actor Raz Degan (it's just that I'm too ugly to act in this film...). And also meaning: "you are my followers", and, it could be added, "I am one of you", Bossi does not look like a "proper" politician, even less than Berlusconi: because of the way he dresses and speaks, he looks more like an angry person who is the leader because he is the angriest of all Padanians ("il piu' incazzato"). In the "humour" page of the Young Padan Movement website, we can also find a trailer of "the first Padan film" titled *El coragius*, "the brave" in Lombardo, that looks like a comic remake of *Braveheart*, played in Lombardo dialect.

The importance of heroic sacrifice for Lega strongly emerges, without irony, in *Camicie Verdi*, a 2006 documentary directed by Claudio Lazzaro that, amongst other "amusements", shows the attempt of inciting people affiliated to the Party to commit "desperate" gestures like shooting at policemen. The Padani and all their numerous enemies (the South Italians, the migrants, the Politicians, even the policemen, that's why Lega has their own vigilanti...) are caught up in a fearsome but adventurous soap opera where the strong temperament of the Lega Nord's leaders, with all their shouting, swearing, gesturing (Bossi gestures and says that Lega "has it hard"), with their hail of blows (*Camicie Verdi* ends with Borghezio in a hospital after being beaten by evil leftist activists), and even bites (Maroni bites a policeman that tries to arrest him), are constantly stirring up the affective intensity of their followers, their numerous interchangeable extras. As this soap opera teaches, the enemy is someone that we need to get rid of whilst staying away from him. The only possible encounter with the enemy is through the beatings of the vigilanti, any other encounter would spoil our purity, and the Lega Nord soap opera manages to produce a sort of hysteria about this, about the danger of contamination that comes from dirty migrants.

How to counter these soap operas? Berlusconi's soap opera of the astute and super rich manager with an unstoppable power, the neoliberal wealthy mafioso who can do

anything he likes... Lega Nord's soap opera of the degradation of our beautiful country through the invasion of a dirty enemy... Two cases different in nature potentially counter these soap operas: the cinema of Lucio Fulci and the festival Summer Drafts.



APPENDIX 7: **A crab in the brain**



APPENDIX 8: **Summer Drafts**

5 Back to B

Back to Bataille. I cannot write this dissertation forever. I made a rather detailed research plan and then I started looking into Bataille's texts to find what I needed. Surely I have made unexpected and unforeseen encounters, and the plan changed considerably in the making, but this time I had a structure in advance. And at the same time, throughout the whole summer, I had the sensation that I was betraying Bataille, I was unhappy with this way of dealing with him, I should have, at least once, abandoned myself to Bataille, let him take me in directions I did not want to go, let myself be overwhelmed by him, lose control over my writing.

Now that several months have passed since that summer, and I feel more detached from the chapter and its contents, I read some passages of *Guilty* I haven't previously used. I read this with nothing precise in mind, to see whether something could happen. I read "Misfortunes of the Present Time". I cannot stop asking myself: what is he doing here? This is a diary of war, it is both an "Exodus" and "Solitude", an exodus from war, that is, another way of facing war, not in a trench, but in a "solitude", the solitude of myself in front of my death, a solitude which has to do with everyone else: "Defying anxiety, I propose my solitude to everybody".²⁷³ Bataille builds a relation with "war", with the misfortunes of the present time, in such a way that he bends war towards himself, across

²⁷³ My translation: In *Guilty* p 61 the translation says: "Defying anxiety I recommend my solitude."

himself, using it as a sort of tool to undo his self. There is no need to go to the front, Bataille risks his life in a different way, in such a way that life is not literally menaced by a death provoked by the weapons of an enemy. It is Bataille himself that, day after day and night after night, “actively” puts himself in danger, facing the misfortunes of the present with his own body.

“I turned to it to lose my thinking in horror – for me, war was torment, falling off a rooftop, a volcano erupting. I despise the boorishness of people drawn to the combat aspect of war; war attracted me by provoking anguish. War professionals, so called, are unfamiliar with these feelings. War is an activity that answers their needs. They go to the front to avoid anguish. Give it your all! That’s what they think counts.”²⁷⁴

I think of the “misfortunes” of our present time. They are such that my subjectivity is already threatened, not with a physical death, but in ways that leave the stability of the self under constant threat. It is not the war that threatens our life, my life and the life of my friends, here in London, in Bolzano, at least not one of those wars represented on TV. What threatens our life is perhaps more difficult to name today, and “to fall off a rooftop”, “a volcano erupting”, are probably inadequate images to stage today’s “horror” (hence, all the more interesting for looking inadequate). So, why should I put my self in danger when it already is so, is already threatened, pressured, pushed towards paranoia, towards a sense of being inadequate, ridiculous, not good enough, by “misfortunes” that are not easy to define?

I’m writing this now, and it has been raining for several days, I haven’t been out since Saturday. Yesterday I watched a film that unsettled me, touching something that I wouldn’t really be able to say, something that had been quiet for some time, and I did not sleep well because of that. I decide to go out now, to pick up a book and get some DVDs from Goldsmiths’ library. It is reading week, I really hope not to meet anyone I know. My hair is dirty, I haven’t washed it for a few days, I cover it with a hat, I never wear hats, it is the first time I wear this one. I go upstairs and I look for DVDs, I have a long list of films I would like to watch, I stare at the list and it is full of titles with their catalogue numbers, too many of them, I don’t know which one to choose, where to go, and I curl up my body, staring at the sheets of paper, looking at the numbers, paralyzed,

²⁷⁴ Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., p 56

I hope no one is looking at me, at this dull one who writes a ten page list of films and then is not able to look for them on the shelves.

It is the same as in the supermarket, when I stare at a single shelf for minutes, unable to use or make up my mind, I read the ingredients, I check the price and then I find myself staring again, and thinking that people are probably looking at me. I think that I should go, I'm wasting my time, I should be home writing my PhD instead, but I'm still here, dragging myself around the aisles.

Back to the library, I go downstairs with my films, I queue and I look with annoyance at the beautiful, long, thick, dark hair of the young student in front of me. I give my card to the librarian, I try not to speak much because I'm ashamed of my accent, how come a PhD student speaks English so poorly. I see an ex student of mine "Ciao, ehm, Ola... I mean hi", luckily she doesn't stop. And finally out, and soon I will take off this stupid hat. I cycle home and I think about Bataille and *Guilty*, and I ask myself: why should I put my self at risk if I'm already so fucked up, that is, if because of a stupid film, a few days of rain, and my PhD, I can be so easily fucked up like this? Why shouldn't I look for help from a professional, someone who is going to tell me that I should love myself, that I should accept myself for what I am, that I should know my limits, that I am the person that counts the most on earth and that I should take great care of myself? What am I going to get from Bataille instead?

A way to answer this question, at the end of this chapter, would be to think Bataille's practice, again, as a practice of doubling. If "war", or whatever we like to call the "misfortunes of the present time", is threatening the stability of our selves, instead of opposing it by protecting ourselves from it, building a "stronger" individual less liable to get wounded by its strokes, instead of opposing today's (neoliberal) cheerfulness in the face of horror, let's take up these forces of "horror", let's face the present misfortunes in our own way, let's deal with these forces in such a way that it is us using them, as a sort of tool impossible to manage correctly, so that we will be freed from the constrictions of ourselves, we'll move towards something like the mutability of a desert. After Debord, who teaches us how to fight a war with an enemy as impalpable and de-individualized as the spectacle, Bataille provides other examples of fighting in the midst of a war, surrounded by it, rather than in opposition to it.

“Ultimately, all depends on the capacity of human groups to articulate at all levels those material and social forces which open to a desire to live and change the world.”²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵ Guattari, “La fine dei feticismi”, in *La rivoluzione molecolare*, op. cit., p 25

Chapter 3

Subjection, frivolity, and pedagogies of the encounter: towards an erratic ecology (Robert Walser)

“You begin a novel without knowing where it will take you; maybe it won’t be a novel at all. But it will be an analytical process; an analytical cartography without a guaranteed outcome. For me, this idea of process is fundamental. It assumes that one has discarded the idea that one must absolutely master an object or a subject – and that the analytical research is given a dimension of finitude, singularity, existential delimitation, precariousness in relation to time and values. Such an ethical and micro-political decentering implies a complete reversal in relation to the educational system. This does not mean that the end yields to the means. Because the formula falls apart: there are neither ends nor means: only processes; nothing but processes; processes auto-constructing life, auto-constructing the world, with mutant, unforeseen, unheard-of affects.” Guattari²⁷⁶

In this chapter I would like to start as closely as possible from “myself”, from personal issues, concerns and desires, in order to depart from myself and the dissertation, along a path that will open onto something other than a subject. What, rather programmatically, sets this chapter in motion are some problems related to my job as a teacher at Goldsmiths. Could Walser affect my teaching in some way? And could the personal become political through Walser?

Coming to terms with the difficulties encountered at Goldsmiths will make this a chapter on pedagogy, and on the relation of pedagogy with art, activism and politics. Pedagogy and political action could be seen as sharing a common ground: they both imply and foster change. It could be said that through political action society changes, whilst students (people) change through pedagogical action. Pedagogy and political action can thereby be thought as allied: pedagogy can bring about politicization. But what kind of change would pedagogy foster? Does pedagogy provide a propaedeutics for political action? Is it political inasmuch it creates critical awareness in the “learners”? How to practice a politics at the micro level of pedagogy, and pedagogy at the macro level of (macro)politics? This chapter will reconsider the alliance between politics and pedagogy, by discussing the methods of radical pedagogues like Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal in relation with the activities of Summer Drafts (2010).²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ Guattari, “Institutional Schizo-Analysis” in *Soft Subversions*, Semiotext(e), 1996 edition, p 63.

²⁷⁷ www.summerdrafts.org

What kind of politics and what kind of pedagogy could emerge from the use of these methods in a non-institutional context like that of Summer Drafts?

Another starting point for the chapter comes from Giorgio Agamben's reading of Robert Walser. *The Coming Community* can function as an entry point to the author and his work. Following from Agamben's reinterpretation of revolution as messianic, the first chapter presents Guy Debord's "doubling" of the spectacle as a way of potentially taking advantage of what the spectacle carries with it – following Agamben: its liberation from any content, from the meaningfulness of truth. In the second chapter, dedicated to Bataille, "doubling" microfascism implies taking advantage of the poignancy desires and affects acquire with capitalism, and an attempt to deal with the "negative" forces that capitalism uses and covers by pathologizing them. But what then is Walser "doubling"? Perhaps the question to address should be this: what can we learn from Walser? Is it possible to draw a pedagogical method from Walser, a method that would "radically" question politics, pedagogy, and their relation?

Agamben writes Debord *again*, he largely writes *against* Bataille, and tries to write on Robert Walser. He *tries* but he does not quite succeed. Half of *The Coming Community* was originally written by Agamben as an essay "On Robert Walser".²⁷⁸ The essay was written in French and published in a somewhat inaccessible magazine, and never republished as such. The name of Walser appears a few times in *The Coming Community*, but almost as if dropped in inadvertently: it vanishes beside those of Debord and Benjamin, upon which the other half of the book draws. Agamben has also edited a couple of Italian collections of texts by Walser, and in one case he has written a preface, but this amounts to just a couple of pages.²⁷⁹ Why is Agamben unable to write Walser again, as he does with Benjamin and Debord?

This chapter is first of all a continuation of a journey whose movements get incited by the recurrent question: how can I act politically starting from myself, starting from the little or nothing I have ("I have nothing!" repeatedly says the protagonist of Agamben's favourite short story written by Walser)?²⁸⁰ In a way this journey is pedagogical in itself: what do I learn through this process? If this thesis is supposed to also be a

278 Agamben, "Sur Robert Walser." In *Détail*, Paris, Pierre Alferi and Suzanne Doppelt (l'Atelier Cosmopolite de la Fondation Royaumont), Autumn 1989 :17-25.

279 Agamben, "Maniere del nulla" in Robert Walser, *Pezzi in Prosa*, Quodlibet, pp. 7-11.

280 Walser, "Non ho nulla", in *Pezzi in prosa*, *op. cit.*, pp 89-93.

manual, it should be said that a manual implies the exhibition of a certain savoir-faire, it can be read as the pedagogical instrument par excellence. What do I learn through the writing of this “manual” and what can this manual make available?

The chapter is composed of different parts: an analysis of the dynamics of a pedagogical institution, starting from personal experiences; a presentation of and a reflection on non-institutional pedagogical practices in the form of a series of dialogues; a close reading of Walser as he intersects with the present and our lived condition (of precarity); a series of “manifestos”, texts that publicly address a wrong doing (starting from the UK government’s cuts to public funding for education) to generate a different future.

The questions driving this chapter could be formulated in these broad terms: how to rethink pedagogy today, how to rethink it as political, as a way of learning, sharing, dealing with each other, inside and outside institutions? Walser can offer some suggestions, towards something like a schizo-pedagogy: we learn to produce desire without (against) the axioms of capitalism (profit, accumulation, private possession... hierarchy, competition, exploitation as their corollaries...), we learn to produce desire as a sort of polyamorous eroticism beyond subjects, engaging with everyone and everything, without criteria and without judgement (for an erotic and light-hearted ecology).

1 As if... beside...teaching...

I haven’t seen Hiwa since Summer Drafts, almost two years ago. I see him again at the Showroom where he presents *Estrangement*, an exhibition curated together with Aneta. A discussion moderated by Janna follows the presentation. Irit is here as well. We watch the video of a performance conducted by Hiwa for the opening of the exhibition. Hiwa had a residency at the Centre for Possible Studies, during which he went around Edgware Road to form *The Chicago Boys*, a band bringing together Iraqi music from the ‘70s and lyrics taken from texts analysing neoliberal economy. Traces of the political ferment of that decade in Iraq are visible in the exhibition: a big photograph shows a bar where people used to gather to read Marx and other “dangerous” authors together. Besides “cooking with mama”, Hiwa is passionate about flamenco and plays the guitar; he considers himself an amateur musician, as well as an amateur artist. The

video shows Hiwa conducting *The Chicago Boys* playing the music for the last scene of Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West*. At some point the sound of the film becomes audible, revealing that Hiwa and his band are not (or not quite) playing the original soundtrack. Both the band playing and the white gringos killing each other in a duel are visible on the screen.

During the discussion Janna talks about Hiwa, about his years as a student in the Frankfurt Academy. The students there had at their disposal an empty wall, which they were supposed to fill with something that by the end of the course would become an artwork. Hiwa leaves the wall empty and starts cooking with and for his colleagues. Janna talks about a modality of the “as if”: as if I was an art student, and *in fact* I am, as if I was an artist, or a musician, and *in fact* I am an artist and a musician... As if we are a band and we play live the soundtrack of a film by Sergio Leone... (there is a play between different roles here and the “as if” could almost become an “and... and... and...”). Whilst Janna talks I consider how she reads everything in terms of pedagogy, as if pedagogy would be a vast plane across which the matter at hand would be dispatched. This “as if” and her beautiful words make my body tremble... This is what I would like to do myself as well! To read everything through pedagogy, to think everything in terms of teaching and learning.

Irit talks as well, she talks about pedagogy and its “beside”: she says how learning is a process that takes place always beside, never *within* a knowledge transfer – we might learn more whilst chatting in the corridor than in class. And Hiwa with his band, taking up again something that comes from an experience of self-organized knowledge in Iraq, plays “beside”, and not against, a Western film that he likes very much, a film that, as with most classical Westerns, celebrates the figure of the good gringo conquering a land (America, Iraq...).

The discussion is over, and Irit comes straight to me and says: “I think this is the way you would like to write.” After a couple of seconds of embarrassment I reply: “I think this is the way I would like to teach.” Our conversation stops there, giving way to the other people who have approached the professor.

I cannot stop thinking about those terms, “as if” and “beside”. I think Irit was pointing at something between Hiwa's performance and this thesis, to understand the beside as

something more than a non-oppositional modality. It could be a beside as “passionate” modality, a passion for music that carries me away... A “beside” as shifting to the margins, towards an almost imperceptible sound that ceases to be in tune with what is in front of us... A beside as a taste for something like a film by Sergio Leone, a taste for a certain “b”, intended as the “b” beside an “a”, as what *pretends* to be “a”, resisting inadvertently its assimilation to an “a”, but also provoking, sometimes, a shattering of the “a”, like with the *almost* “a” of Robert Walser / Jakob von Gunten.

As if I am a PhD student, as if this is a PhD thesis, as if I am a teacher... There is an “as if” in Agamben as well, taken from Saint Paul: as if you were a slave, as if you were a Jew... Agamben talks about a “cut”, a superposition of two identities, as two opposite and incompatible identities that are nonetheless lived together. You are a slave according to the Roman Law but you are free according to the Law of God, and you play with this tension, producing a suspension of your identity. You do not need to become a freedman to be free, you do not need to convert to become a Christian. Keep playing the role assigned to you, and “cut it” from beneath, with a conflicting condition that does not need to appear, with an incompatibility that does not need to become public.²⁸¹

Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s – there is quite a precise differentiation in Agamben / Paul, and quite a clear cut: on one side there is the public, on the other the private, on one side you face Caesar (politics as public, as what appears) on the other an intimate relation with God (the micro as separated from the macro, they meet only at the point of the cut). With this “as if” you carry on performing as it is required by the institutions, by the academy, by the state, and at the same time, as an individual, you silently go against the grain of your official role. I am a “slave” of the institution I work for, but I carry out a micro performance as a free man.

Agamben’s “as if” got me excited in the first place. But is it really possible to separate the macro and micro in such a way? Is it really possible to “cut” in any way, for the “b” to shatter the “a”, by separating a private from a public politics? This strategy seems too safe, maybe usefully safe for prosecuted Christians, but too discretely safe for us today, as a way of trying to convince my (bourgeois) self that I act politically without openly challenging my status, and, together with it, my privileges.

²⁸¹ Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, *op. cit.*, pp 46-57.

As if I am a PhD student, as if I am a teacher... how would this “as if” differ from Agamben’s? There is not a double register here, not a separation between an inside and outside myself, between a micro and a macro: I’m not a teacher hired by Goldsmiths and secretly an activist instigating my students to the revolution. This “as if” might be a sort of confusion about my role and my identity, a mystification that starts from myself. Am I really a teacher? Yes, I am, and yet, not quite, I do not fit that role “properly”.

I would like to explain the “confusion” of this “as if” through a passage written by Precarias a la deriva about militant investigation: “as if” would be a way of “taking again that old feminist practice that negates the separation of personal and political, macro and micro, theory and praxis, and invites the politicization of existence, to make your own everyday life a battlefield.”²⁸² There is a battlefield here, there is a sense of militancy embedded in the everyday, a sense that does not necessarily emerge from Hiwa’s “as if”, and it is probably at odds with an “as if” that questions the coincidence of roles and identities with one another. But in Precarias themselves, as in the “old feminist practice”, this militancy is generated from the most “banal” instances of our everyday life, which constitute the barely perceptible, *uncertain* material of their “militant investigation”.²⁸³ And this quotation gives us to think here the “as if” together with militancy and war machines, to intensify that other uncertainty which pushes us away from the possibility of discerning between a manufactured and an involuntary shattering: a film reinforces and legitimises the ideal of the “Good Yankee” rightly conquering the barbarous (my own?) land – but for some reason I like the film so much! The Institute B makes us all servants, ready to follow orders – but for some reason it drives me crazy, it makes us fall in love...

From here, an important question emerges: how to make the uncertainty of this “as if” dangerous not (only) for myself, but for the institution, for the bigger machinery? Jakob von Gunten provokes the collapse of the Institute Benjamenta, but he does not perish. He exposes himself to danger all the time, to the violence of the master, to the attraction of the sister and his fellow students, to the discipline of the Institute... The disaster takes

²⁸² Precarias a la deriva, “De preguntas, ilusiones, enjambres y desiertos. Apuntes sobre investigacion y militancia desde Precarias a la deriva” in Marta Malo ed., *Nociones Comunes*, Madrid, Traficantes de sueños, 2004, p 83.

²⁸³ Precarias a la deriva, *A la deriva*, Madrid, Traficantes de sueños, 2004.

place, but not (only) for him: he is not expelled from the Institute (as you might get sacked from Goldsmiths).

This is not “how I would like to write” – as Irit says – this is how I would like to teach. Somehow I already write “as if”, as if I were a PhD student; and I already organize Summer Drafts “as if” I were a cultural organizer. I would also like to teach “as if” I were a teacher: so far I have just been trying to be a “good teacher”.

Does the current “crisis” in academia speak of the collapse of a system, or a further restructuring of the current system according to neoliberal principle? Rhetorical question. It could be said that academia is in the process of “reinforcing” itself, by becoming a business like many others. As a waiter in a restaurant, the teacher has to provide a performance to satisfy the clients, he has to entertain them, give them the impression that their money is well spent, despite the high prices on a menu that you haven’t consulted in advance. Sure, there’s more than that to teaching; and still, both teaching and waitressing could be seen as a kind of “prostitution”: you put your body on display, you smile, you make sure you create a good atmosphere, and you deliver knowledge on a plate, ready to be consumed. What Lonely Planet does to attract tourists to a Japanese restaurant in London, specialized international agencies do for universities in order to attract (Japanese) clients. Italian tourists in a Japanese restaurant in London often cannot know how bad the sushi they are eating is, and Japanese students sometimes cannot really understand how bad (or good) the “knowledge” is that they take notes of, sometimes because they don’t really know the language well enough, despite the English exam they have paid for. The college management obliges the department to accept higher and higher numbers of “Overseas Students”, who pay three times the already expensive fees that a European student pays. The Italian tourist goes home with a belly full of rotten rice, and the Japanese student goes home with the “Goldsmiths” brand on her CV. Of course, everything is much more complex than this, both in restaurants and universities.

It is through Jakob’s body, through his gestures, that an “as if” takes place, not through a detailed scientific study of the Institute. Jakob lives as part of the Institute, the Institute is not his object of research. Unless we understand Jakob’s research as “militant”, as Precarias a la deriva’s militant research.

The day after seeing Hiwa, Janna and Irit, I write an email to Andy: “I want to teach like Jacob von Gunten learns.” I don’t even know what this really means, but it feels to me this can make sense. This means for sure that I want to talk about teaching and learning in this chapter, and it happens that, according to the plans, this chapter is supposed to be dedicated to Robert Walser. To learn how to teach (and learn) by re-acting Walser in the context of pedagogy: how can I do this? We have a tutorial and Andy does not question for a second my proposal and starts disclosing different possibilities for the chapter to materialize (Andy schizoanalyst).



APPENDIX 9: Pedagogical analysis



APPENDIX 10: Art, activism, pedagogy: Summer Drafts 2

2 Walser without (Agamben’s) parameters – perimeters

Impossibility of writing on Walser: I have been delaying this moment for many pages. And now that I have to start with Walser I’m stuck. I don’t want to write on (“sur”) Walser. There is not much written on Walser, at least not much available in English. With the essays of Walter Benjamin, Giorgio Agamben, and especially Roberto Calasso, we have something which is much more a writing “with” or “through” Walser than on Walser.²⁸⁴

To write “on” Walser is impossible, his writing cannot be talked “about”, you could talk about features of his writing, but in fact it seldom displays any “features”. Features, aspects, characteristics: everything you try to read in Walser is impossible to be individuated, because everything in Walser twists, contradicts itself, slips, becomes

²⁸⁴ Sebald as well has recently written “with” Walser, in an essay where he writes himself as if he was a character of Walser. Sebald, “Le Promeneur Solitaire”, introduction to, Walser, *The Tanners*, New Directions, 2009.

ungraspable. To read Walser is like continuously falling into a void, into breaches. No doubt a new ground momentarily arises, but then this too tends to give way. And yet, I want to write on Walser, it feels like writing a different chapter. A chapter on Walser and pedagogy: Walser was a student, a servant, a copyist, a shopkeeper, a clerk, and of course a writer, but never a teacher, and when he occasionally talks of teachers, he depicts them as larvae, shadows of themselves.²⁸⁵

What would be Walser's (pedagogical) method? Walser walks. "More on this later", as he would write. Walser also works: before retiring into an asylum in 1929, at the age of 41, Walser had different jobs – probably this is also part of his method: the jobs he did were all modest and none of them lasted very long, save for his "job" as a writer, which occupied most of his life, and which somehow encompassed all the other jobs. In a way, for Walser working becomes part of walking. From job to job, from inn to inn, from lake to lake... Is this a pedagogical method?²⁸⁶

"...and on the basis of this extraordinary and yet also quite ordinary existence, I am constructing here a commonsensical book from which nothing at all can be learned. There are, to be sure, persons who wish to extract from books guiding principles for their lives. For this sort of most estimable individual I am therefore, to my gigantic regret, not writing. Is that a pity? Oh yes."²⁸⁷

Debord, Bataille, Walser, each offer different ways of experimenting with subjectivation, producing different forms of life, or, as Agamben calls it, "anthropological mutations".²⁸⁸ Debord, Bataille, Walser as three pedagogical models: what do we learn from them? Which kind of activism, which kind of politics do they engender?

Walser beside Walser becomes many other Walsers without a name, or with the many names he finds for his characters. The flexible changing of roles that we are asked to

²⁸⁵ Walser, *Jakob von Gunten*, New York Review, 1999.

²⁸⁶ In 1992 Hans Ulrich Obrist founds the Robert Walser Museum as a museum on the move with the starting point at the Hotel Krone in Gais (Appenzell, Switzerland). The museum consisted in a small travelling vitrine: "The idea was to establish a non-monumental, modest, and very discreet museum, an elastic institution which can permanently question its own definitions and parameters and which is less dependant on static hardware than big structures. The museum is in permanent transformation and tries to avoid routine." See <http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-1-9712/msg00042.html>

²⁸⁷ Walser, *The Robber*, University of Nebraska Press, 2000, pp 4-5.

²⁸⁸ Agamben. "Warum war und ist Robert Walser so wichtig?" Akademie der Künste, Berlin, as part of *Robert Walser: Unter Menschen, die einander achten, möchte ich leben*. April 17, 2005.

perform today are prophetically already given a doubled form in Walser, Debord and Bataille; and the first of these, chronologically furthest away from us, is somehow the closest to us. Walser is us, schizo *ante litteram*. Walser lives at the beginning of the 20th Century, always changing roles, changing jobs, changing place, shifting identity without progression, precarious, and overwhelmed by this very process. Walser-schizo offers a way for us to double ourselves as schizo. From Walser's schizo, to Deleuze and Guattari's schizo, to us, this is what I want to learn from this chapter.

Walser is overwhelmed, affected by so many things, hills, lakes, charming ladies, theatrical representations, young boys, a village, *Romeo and Juliet in the Village*, a bottom, a stove, the waitress, a tram-ride, the schoolmaster, a sausage, a poet, a wood... We are overwhelmed, affected by so many things as well, the impression is of a bombardment by stimuli of all kinds, sometimes I don't even notice it because it feels like a uniform exposure to some sort of general radiation (and it is often literally radiations, coming from a computer screen). But the difference between Walser and us is not so much on what is affecting us, but on the kind of affection underway. It is difficult to tell in Walser the degree to which a protagonist finds himself affected or conversely finds himself affecting, as though himself was making lakes, sausages, waiters, actors, and so many other things reverberate and sparkle. It is as if Walser weaves a field of intensities to which he is subjected in the first place. There is something like a self-reflexivity, but this is not closed in on itself, it is erratic, it wanders everywhere, like Walser does in his walks. And so we cannot really talk of a "field" of intensities because there are no discernible perimeters in Walser. It is difficult to separate Walser, not only from the characters he writes, but from everything else: even a stove begins to tremble, animated by its own identification. "Some possibility, otherwise I suffocate", sighs the stove. Pedagogy of affection: the paroxysm of passivity, Walser strolling around as a *nullafacente* (as a "someone-doing-nothing" - the English term would be a good-for-nothing) becomes a proliferation of micro actions, an affection with neither perimeter nor parameter.

Walser is always caught up in a becoming-many of himself, with different names, with no name, different roles, although you can often tell that is always Walser. "As if": it is Walser. You cannot really know who Walser is, he is much more than a person, and yet, also himself.

You try to give yourself some coherence: you arrange the changes in your life along a line of progression and development, where different experiences make you better, more capable (to work), they make you function better, feel better. You see this and that, you travel as much as you can, you cultivate different interests, maybe to take a break away from your job, to do something else, since you don't really like your job so much, but we have to work anyway, such is life. You cultivate myself, the place where you live, you take care of yourself, you try to love yourself, with all your limits. There is so much available in order to affirm your unique personality: the clothes you wear, the music you listen to, the parties you go, your favourite food, the objects of design you collect in your room, your screensaver, your sexual preferences, your pot of basil, your favourite TV series, your books, your facebook profile and all your digital friends. And yet, this sense of emptiness that sometimes seizes your throat... But it doesn't last long because you have so many things to do that you cannot really stop and think about it: luckily, you're really busy.

Walser is unstable as well, but he seems to construct, or reconstruct, this instability for himself. Most of all, he does not undergo this for any purpose. He is restless not because he is forced to or forces himself to, his restlessness has no goal, it is not part of a trajectory (a carrier), or a drive for self-satisfaction. Walser pursues that restlessness, he is carried by it, and it is through the randomness of his encounters that this restlessness doubles our own. This double does not happen through a dispossession, through what Agamben calls "desubjectivation", nor through establishing a closer, more direct relation with a familiar "natural" world around us: lakes, hills, trees, a stove, animals, and so on. Our precarity is a condition in which we are both accommodated and totally insecure. Walser's precarity is a condition of insecurity, but this insecurity does not become accommodated: this is the quality of Walser's double.

It is not a matter of dispossession, of a more direct relation with simple things: "I have nothing" repeatedly says the protagonist of one of Agamben's favourite short tales.²⁸⁹ According to Agamben, this "have-not" (*nullatenente*) who is Walser, is not suggesting that we rid ourselves of our pinchbeck, but to recognize that all of us have nothing, despite whatever pinchbeck we still possess. We have nothing and yet we have one another, "all my friends, human beings and animals", and it is probably on the base of

²⁸⁹ Walser, *Pezzi in prosa*, Quodlibet, 2009, pp. 89-93.

this “nothing” that we can experiment with a different modality of being together.²⁹⁰ This is what Agamben seems to suggest in “Maniere del nulla”, the preface of *Pezzi in Prosa*, a collection with which Walser’s “Non ho nulla” concludes. In this collection, Agamben notes, Walser’s “manner” gets close “to the circus ballet, it gets radicalized into pantomime”. Pantomime is a theatre of gestures, a theatre where the transmission of meaning comes into question. This reference to a theatrical form, coming from Agamben, brings us back to a staging that is also our own today, precarious nephews of the spectacle. According to Agamben, each of them performs a different kind of theatre: Debord a commedia dell’arte, Bataille a farce, Walser a pantomime.

Agamben specifies the character of Debord’s and Walser’s theatre, the first as a Commedia dell’Arte, as a theatre of stereotyped characters combining words and codified gestures, the second as a pantomime, as short stories narrated with a mime technique, through gestures. Debord, Bataille and Walser present themselves as histrionic characters, as people of theatre. The three of them can only perform through exaggeration, excessiveness, their characters thereby left deserted, collapse and crumble. Debord wears masks produced by the spectacle, in tragi(comic) and “glamorous” parodies of the spectacle and himself. Bataille engages with a deathly drama of tears and laughter, always on the verge of collapsing into the ridiculousness of his own performance. Walser offers himself as a plurality of Walsers, in frivolous and rarefied *divertissements* without much of a narrative to speak of, within which he, as the main character, is affected by a trembling that leaves everything else unstable in turn. Histrionic gesture of losing what is significant about its language: “the histrionic gesture is in strict relation with the designation of the lived emotion, before it is signified by the word: sudden gesture, without meaning in itself, but simulating hence interpretable, it marks the almost imperceptible demarcation in which impulses still hesitate to present themselves to an identification.”²⁹¹ Something happens outside the known, it brings everything back to a catalogue of minimal gestures, where nothing yields to knowledge in an epistemological sense.

“Walser’s pantomimes are initiations where there is nothing to learn, gestures where the human being dissolves any mystery: walks.”²⁹² Agamben refers here to Walser’s prose

²⁹⁰ Agamben, “Maniere del nulla”, in Walser, *Pezzi in prosa*, *op. cit.* pp. 7-11.

²⁹¹ Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 335.

²⁹² Agamben, “Maniere del nulla”, in Walser, *Pezzi in Prosa*, *op. cit.*, p 10

as becoming increasingly simple throughout the collection. But the reference is also to a theatre that does not transmit knowledge, to a performance that neither reveals nor conceals anything: this is the sense of Walser's frivolity. Frivolous: silly, empty, trifling, brittle; it comes from the Latin *friare*: to break, rub away, crumble. In this short preface Agamben describes Walser / the character of "I have nothing", as the image of a different being together: "this metaphysical young pup [...] flashes in front of our eyes the enigmatic image of a *being together* which has not the form of a *relation* anymore and constitutes therefore the specifically *political* legacy that Walser's art entrusts as inheritance to our times."²⁹³ But what is a being together that has not the form of a relation? We need to get closer to Walser to attempt an answer, to understand this suggestive expression that, once more in Agamben, brings together two opposites (a being together without relation).

The strolling boy encounters a calf, a dog, a goat... other beings who are as "not-having" as himself. They cannot communicate by words, there is no exchange of discursive meaning, but the different characters of the tale still communicate somehow. It is as if the others ask the protagonist to give them something, when he has nothing to give. The "young pup" doesn't stop, until he realizes that to have nothing is what we all have in common: it is this having nothing, without an even provisionally meaningful language through which to express itself, that seems to make these encounters possible. Always apparently fleeting, they are marked by intense affections. The animals become something else, the boy cannot stop walking in his thoughtlessness (and yet he thinks, he cares, in the absence of thought). At the end of the walk he sits on the grass and cries, and what seemed to be almost a parable suddenly turns into a walk that Walser really makes in the countryside, with animals that really cross his path, with Walser thinking and crying, sitting on the grass, probably "bitterly", astonished by the "beauty of the world".

To understand this experience of being together that Walser presents in this tale, we should get even closer and write the whole of it again. To indicate in Walser a "metaphysic young pup", as Agamben does, to write, through Walser, the ontology of a being in common, is to inscribe Walser into parameters and perimeters that Walser constantly undoes. The having nothing of the tale is not a (universal? human?) condition. It is not a condition but a possibility. It is not "potentiality", as a condition

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p 11.

where the being together expresses a form of dialectic without ends in the absence of all relation. It is something possible, a possibility of freeing us from property and possession, from our self-possession first of all.

Walser keeps changing jobs, from servant, to office-worker, to copyist. At the same time he works as a writer, he writes and tries to publish. This precariousness and this double working life has become pervasive today, especially if we work in the “creative industry”, as Walser used to do. I do what I like, but this does not pay me, or not enough, and I also have to work for money. Or, if I have only a job, I work for money and because this job is meaningless I do something else besides, perhaps some of the many courses organized in my hometown, from knitting to kick-boxing. Or at least I plan my holidays in an exotic place so that I can have a proper break. I do and pay for a PhD and at the same time I teach, to get some money to survive. I organize Summer Drafts, I teach to get money and to pay for a PhD that I write in my spare time. How is Walser doubling our working / living conditions? He is not separating his two jobs from each other, writing on one side and copying on the other. He is writing again what he does, and this is his activism. His jobs are not something that he does to survive, but something that he does to write. They become part of a writing machine.

Writing is not really a job for Walser, in the sense that, after some time, he doesn't even write to publish anymore. Most of his writings are written on miniscule sheets of paper, and sometimes they get lost. This is not a job: Walser is a writing machine, even in the way the writing is produced, in this literal sense of a machine through which everything passes. All the “real” jobs are written through it. Everything goes into this writing machine, and this is different from what seems to happen to us most of the time: everything seems to go into our job, every aspect of our life tends to be determined by it. In my “free time” I go to see exhibitions around London, but this is part of my job. In my “leisure time” I go to the pub with my PhD colleagues, but this is also part of my job. Tonight I go to the cinema, but I make sure to see a film that I might be able to refer to in class, or at least in a conversation with my students during the break. And so on.

What does it mean that Walser is a writing machine? For Walser to write is not an aspiration, is not what he would really like to do besides working for a living; here Agamben is right, this is an “Experiment”, an experimentation with anthropological

mutation, “a questioning of human existence”,²⁹⁴ whilst my job, myself talking with friends, drinking in a bar, walking around, it all becomes part of it. In Walser there is something like a “writing” (art) that reorganizes life and the division of labour it is ordinarily subject to. A (political) set of forces that turns a job into something else (writing / art, politics, activism) and a life into something more than my life. I am not a writer, I am not a teacher either, I become part of a machine. It is “as if” I am a teacher, “as if” I am a writer, “as if” I am a servant: ““But you hardly have the makings of a servant, I should think’, the aforementioned clever, elegant gentleman declared. I took the liberty of responding: ‘Why should I need to? I fully agree I’m completely unsuitable to be one.’”²⁹⁵

We can find something similar in Foucault, in his notion of the “specific intellectual”²⁹⁶: everyone would become an intellectual, not in the “spare time”, not as an escape from your boring job, but across your job and the institution you work for, the field you work in, and this is your specificity as an intellectual, the specificity of a (changing) position. The workplace in Foucault is the place where an intellectual / activist machine stands to be constructed.

I don’t work to receive a living, my life becomes part of a living experiment, experimenting forms of life. Walser’s writing machine is also a war machine, then: a “political” machine, a becoming political (Agamben talks about Walser’s “political legacy”).²⁹⁷

But from Agamben’s metaphysics of a “being together without relations”, we risk a shift to an engagement with life as “activism” which similarly relies on the individuation of a structure: political activism as the priority that should reorganize our lives. Unless we bring together Foucault’s “specific intellectual” with his proposal of living a life that is “art”: this would be the sense of Walser’s writing machine. The specific / militant intellectual, the political life that takes over, this might actually be in itself something different from Walser’s writing machine: what characterizes Walser and the frivolity (fragility, frailty...) of his machine is an (artistic) crumbling of

²⁹⁴ Agamben, “Warum war und ist Robert Walser so wichtig?”, *op. cit.*

²⁹⁵ Walser, “Tobold (II)”, in *Masquerade and other Stories*, Quartet Books, 1993, p 81.

²⁹⁶ Presented in the introduction. Foucault, “The Political Function of the Intellectual”, *Radical Philosophy* 17, Summer 1977: 12-14.

²⁹⁷ Agamben. “Warum war und ist Robert Walser so wichtig?”, *op. cit.*

characterizations, the transience of parameters. The political then is not a characterization, it is not a mission to which we dedicate our entire life, jobs included: it is beyond parameter and beyond Politics, and these are the operational and artistic features that Walser's writing machine does not cease to show us.

Walser and the coming community

In Walser we could find many aspects of what we live today: a precariousness of our life, of social bonds and relations; an overexposure to different stimuli that make unstable our sense of identity; the vastness of a range of experiences to choose for ourselves, to improve ourselves and our careers; a kind of superficiality, a peculiar cheerfulness that avoids confronting problems. Agamben does not specifically discuss these features in *The Coming Community*, but, as we have seen already, this book provides a re-writing (a doubling) of some negative features that could be identified as contemporary (a "Whatever" of disengagement, a "Limbo" of alienation, a catastrophic "Irreparable" and so on). Through his essay dedicated to Walser, Agamben writes his own doubling, but Agamben and Walser's doubling are of an entirely different nature.

In Agamben what is repeated is saved, perhaps at a point "beyond salvation" as Agamben says, but still, there is a strong sense of redemption in Agamben's balancing between salvation and damnation (in his doubled "Limbo"). This is also what Agamben reads in Walser: his characters become messianic figures, angels beyond good and bad. But Walser never achieves a suspended status of any kind, this is precisely what he constantly avoids, producing a never ending instability, that surely fascinates Agamben, but that Agamben ends up keeping under control: the undisciplined Walser falls back into line.

We can see this profound distance between Walser and Agamben also in the different use they make, their different doubling, of other writers' texts. Agamben uses texts written by (great) authors, Walser takes texts often written by no one, cheap popular novels and love stories, something like the paperback bestsellers that today people read on the tube in London. "Ah, manufacturer of gold helped by a charitable hand, with what a circumspection have I read it!"²⁹⁸ Walser is not the first to use these sort of texts

²⁹⁸ And right before: For a year I took the very strange and somewhat ridiculous habit of firstly reading and studying with extreme assiduousness such little books, and secondly, immediately after, of drawing

for his own writings, but the use he makes of them is rather peculiar. In a way, there is no use at all. They are used as a catalyst through which to write, but without a specific purpose, or with the purposeless purpose of saying something “funny, selfish, playful”. They enter into Walser’s writing machine to become part of a “personal story”. This is a doubling of something like popular banality, maybe closer to Pop Art than to Lautreamont. But in comparison with Pop Art, this reproduction of mass produced banality is just a marginal aspect in Walser’s writing. Walser’s literary doubling lacks that sense of contravention, of exhibited absurdity, of critical intent, that can be detected in the sort of lineage which runs from Lautreamont to Debord. There is a less perceptible doubling in Walser, or perhaps a doubling that is concerned not with single texts but overall commonsense, the production of an operative philosophical knowledge, of a dominant moral discourse.

Already in his essay on Walser, which later becomes the basis for *The Coming Community*, Agamben lays claim to a certain “messianism”. His creatures are creatures of limbo, untouched by salvation, creatures of a time after God’s judgement, which is also, in Agamben, our time.²⁹⁹ Strange creatures that are human nonetheless: a description of ourselves, Walser shows us as doubled. Between us and our doubles there is nothing, save for a “tiny displacement”, Agamben says. But through Agamben we get a sense of Walser’s characters as rooted in their “irreparability”. Our “task” then would not be one of doubling (re-writing) ourselves as characters or subjects, through a process of “announcement” or “recognition” (of the coming Messiah), but, as Agamben himself suggests elsewhere, of doubling ourselves through an experiment in “anthropological mutation” (which, we should add, would necessarily carry us beyond ourselves).³⁰⁰

Walser is covered over by Agamben in the passage from “Sur Robert Walser” to *The Coming Community*, within which his name appears only infrequently. But precisely as such, Walser becomes even more the “example” at stake here, an example of the coming community, a particular case which “cannot serve in its particularity”. By concealing Walser’s “particularity”, Agamben makes of it something like the secret of

from what I had read a personal story, that is, something humorous, facetious, egotistic, funny and playful [...] the issue consisting in extracting and deducing occasions of writing from someone else’s creations, an activity that I have exercised several times with the most intense regret, it has provoked, as I can suppose, a sensation.” Walser, *Diario del 26*, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-9.

²⁹⁹ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, *op. cit.* pp11-2.

³⁰⁰ Agamben. “Warum war und ist Robert Walser so wichtig?” *op. cit.*

the coming community. Sometimes Agamben erases Walser's name from the original text, as he does at the end of the essay where "de creatures de Walser" is substituted by the "whatever being".³⁰¹ To read again the parts of *The Coming Community* dedicated to Walser as "Sur Robert Walser", as an essay on Walser, makes them more tangible and less obscure. Walser is here not always and not necessarily the example of a (messianic) coming community. The essay on Walser starts with "From Limbo" and "Demonic", which place Walser in comparison with "the powerful theological machine of Christian *oiconomia*", with its good and evil, blessed and damned, angel and demons: Agamben reads Walser's characters as creating a condition of potentiality beyond those dichotomies.³⁰² "Irreparable" presents Walser's as the world "post iudicium", and reads Walser in terms of "absolute exposure" and "absolute abandonment". Everything in Walser is "irreparable", it is as it is, there is no salvation for this world (there is no salvation for our world), this is a world that has left salvation behind, says Agamben.

"Limbo", "Demonic", and "Irreparable" become categories of the present that block and immobilize something that, in Walser itself, is everything but "as it is". Agamben confines Walser in a limbo, he reads his characters as demons / angels who are "infinitely susceptible to being tempted". But he also brilliantly recognizes that "every relationship with them seems always on the verge of ending up in bed", perceiving and hinting at a kind of eroticism that in Walser invests everything.³⁰³

Agamben makes circulate here a sense of "exposure" and "abandonment": exposure pertaining to a certain theatricality in Walser, the doubling of an injunction to appear and expose yourself as part of a spectacle. We could say that in Walser, rather than "abandonment" to this exposure, there is an active and laborious "serving" of this exposure, (pretending to) adapt to it, *as if* I expose myself, when in fact there is not much hidden there. But exposure in Walser is not a giving myself to someone, to something, to a situation: exposure is fundamentally ungraspable in nature, it expresses the impracticality of being recognized, described, defined.

In the section "Pseudonyms" Agamben focuses on Walser's "language", which he defines as "a language that has declined any pretence of denomination [...] almost as if

³⁰¹ Agamben, "Sur Robert Walser", *op. cit.*, p. 25 / Agamben, *The Coming Community*, *op. cit.*, p 9.

³⁰² Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p 6.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

every term raised an objection against its own denominative power.”³⁰⁴ Hence, pseudonym would be a name that is not entirely a name, a name that refuses to name, to perform its task of naming. Agamben reads this refusal as an exhaustion, words in Walser being like “dead tired” little dancers. Agamben reads Walser’s as a language of exhaustion, set after the last day. If it is exhaustion, this is not a messianic one, it is not an exhaustion of the end of the world, but an “exhaustion” which continues to abound, an overflowing, hyper-productivity, a restless flow of hurried words that leave their meaning behind.

Agamben reads in Walser’s a “delicate balance between ‘modest imprecision’ and mannerist stereotype.”³⁰⁵ Again, Agamben sensitively registers Walser’s delicacy, the peculiar amalgamation of mannerist imprecision in his language, but then treats as a “balance” what is in fact a constant sliding out of balance.³⁰⁶

In “Example”, once again, Agamben combines a refined reading of Walser with its immobilization into the potentiality of his coming community. This is writing “sur” Walser, “on” Walser: it is a summary, a description, a denomination.³⁰⁷ Walser is an “example”, a “para-deigma”, “what is shown alongside”. Walser describes our world, as an “example” of our world, and his characters are “examples” of us. In Agamben they are examples of a coming community. Walser shows us (exposes) a world “as if” it was our world.

Agamben ends the essay on Walser with two sections on language. A certain kind of language, language beyond denomination, is used as a tool for the Messiah to come. Agamben’s “tiny displacement” takes place through language, through (Agamben’s) writing itself. But Walser is more than a production of a certain kind of language, he is more than himself and more than a writer. Walser is not just using language to make politics happen, he is using himself. Agamben keeps talking about Walser on one side and his characters on the other side, but Walser is a writing machine, an entanglement

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p 59-60

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p 59

³⁰⁶ The “objection against denominative power” is performed differently in Walser and Agamben: in Agamben there is an arrangement of echoing terms enclosed into balanced compositions, in Walser a chatter that keeps falling to pieces.

³⁰⁷ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, *op. cit.* pp 10-11: “These pure singularities [he is also referring to Walser’s characters] communicate only in the empty space of the example, without being tied by any common property, by any identity. They are expropriated of all identity, so as to appropriate belonging itself.”

of Walser the writer, who uses language (poetically, philosophically), of Walser who... lives, of Walser as all the other Walsers, and everything else this machine comes across and engages with. If Walser experiments with “anthropological mutations” he does that also with his own body, and not only with his books. And the mutation is not just anthropological, it does not concern only us, as human beings, but an ecology “on the verge of ending up in bed” (humans, animals, writers, stoves, servants, waitresses, lakes, dogs, walks, sunsets, sausages, beds...), an ecology whose perimeters are always uncertain.



APPENDIX 11: Carla, un-power

3 Precarious Walser as a robber

“But which is the revolutionary path? Is there one? [...] To go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and practise of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to ‘accelerate the process’, as Nietzsche puts it: in this matter the truth is that we haven’t seen anything.”³⁰⁸

“The by-your-leave-ism, don’t-mind-if-I-do-ishness of pedestrians on the streets vexes motorists. One more quick thing I’d like to say: there’s a stand-in here who won’t listen to me. I intend to abandon him to his pig-headedness. I’ll leave him most splendidly forgotten. But now a mediocrity has scored a success with Edith. He wears, at any rate, one of those flattering hats that lend all their wearers a modern appearance. I’m mediocre myself, and quite please that I am, but there was nothing mediocre about the Robber on his woodland bench, otherwise he couldn’t possibly have whispered to himself: ‘Once I frolicked through the streets of a luminous city as a clerk and dreaming patriot...’”³⁰⁹

Precariousness in Walser, as for us, is not only about employment, but life as such. Nothing can consider itself secure in Walser, everything is uncertain, indecisive. Cities, places, paths: all of these change with a disconcerting vagary. He falls in love all the time, with aristocratic ladies, young waitresses, sometimes even boys. He meets many

³⁰⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, op. cit., pp 239-240.

³⁰⁹ Walser, *The Robber*, op. cit., p 2.

people but these encounters are always transient. He cannot stay in the same place and with the same people for long.

Our life is also precarious. I have been living in different European cities, and London will probably not be last one. I live not only in London but Bolzano as well. I have moved several times. I have come across many people and seen many of them disappear. I don't fall in love easily because I have no time for that. The other day my mother was telling me about the housing block we used to live in when I was a child. I never realized that it was quite different from the one we live now. Everybody knew each other, and many people were friends. Not only with their direct neighbours but with people across the block. It had its own life. Some people were close to each other, some less so, and still others not at all, but there was a sense of living together. My parents had many German speaking friends. When we left the housing block they were still friends but it was not the same, now they see each other only by chance, in town, as it was almost by chance that they used to meet each other in the housing block. I never really became friends with any German speaking child, in fact we were either ignoring each other or sometimes fighting against each other, we were "enemies", going to a different school. Now I would not recognize them in the street. The housing block where we live now is different, people tend not to stay for long "We are lucky that in our landing we are still the same families after almost ten years", says my mother. I always say hello to everybody in this block of flats, even if I don't know the people, but very few reply. The neighbours talking across balconies have left already long ago. Precarious conversation, it can still take place.

Precariousness also defines the difficult task of giving consistency to a form of sociality that one would then be a part of, as Precarias a la deriva, amongst others, indicate.³¹⁰ In this sense precarity often gives rise to isolation. In a way this is the starting point for the dissertation: what can I do by myself, what can I do (politically) if I am alone, if I'm not able to join an existing group. Walser is solitary as well. But at the same time he is not: his life is traversed by uninitiated encounters, in such a way that perhaps he is less capable of cultivating a lifelong relationship, but he develops a capacity of "encountering" even a button – and not without deriding both himself and his new acquaintance (what kind of politics can we make with a button or a stove?).

³¹⁰ Precarias a la deriva, "De preguntas, ilusiones, enjambres y desiertos", *op. cit.*

Walsler doubles today's precariousness, he keeps moving, changing place, but not to build up a career, he meets many people but not as part of a networking strategy, he falls in love but not because he is looking for a relationship. I wish to push all this to an extreme of Walsler as "teacher", Walsler as exemplary for us. But Walsler is not only what I, fairly comfortably, summarize here: it is all the incongruities, all that mockery of himself, of us readers, of himself as the characters that his texts produce in disquieting ways, characters that make it impossible to summarize Walsler.

Walsler is schizo, not in the form of a self assaulted by too many stimuli, a hyper-active self, but through the development of a capacity to become part of a concatenation, of gears and components moved through desire, of forces, a gust of wind connecting different elements, whilst those elements, including the self, cease to be determinable as themselves. It is probably in *The Robber* more than anywhere else that Walsler becomes erratic and double (Robert / Reuber), to the extent that the entire novel, at every moment, seems to be on the verge of dissolution. From psychoanalysis (the doctor visiting Walsler in *The Robber*) to schizoanalysis (the Robber's encounter with the doctor), Walsler stages himself beside himself, and beside himself there is always something else, something altogether difficult to describe. Walsler as a schizoanalyst can help us developing this capacity, showing us schizoanalysis as something we can practise. Walsler stops making sense of himself and his surroundings, allowing something else to emerge, a series of eruptions.

"Yesterday I cut myself a switch. Imagine this: an author strolls about in the Sunday countryside, harvest a switch, which allows him to put on colossal airs, devours a roll with ham, and finds, whilst he's polishing off this roll with ham, that the waitress, a damsel splendidly slim as a switch, merits being approached with the query: 'Would you strike me on the hand with my switch, miss?' nonplussed, she retreats from the petitioner. Nothing of the sort has ever before been asked of her."³¹¹

There is something like a repetition of the same, the same walk, the same Walsler under so many different names or anonymous walkers, the same charming ladies, the same conversations, the same landscapes. At the same time it is never the same, not even similar to itself, and Walsler keeps writing himself, multiplying himself, Walsler after Walsler, walk after walk. But all his writing is far away from any sort of autobiography,

³¹¹ Walsler, *The Robber*, *op. cit.*, p 4.

Walser does not present the story of his life, he tells again a possible story, a story that could be anyone's, where, most of the time, not very much seems to happen.

If I go into a text by Walser to find there what I'm writing of Walser here, yes, I can find something evidential, but I also find so much else. Contradiction is not the right term, it is a sort of derision without subject nor object, a strange performance, Walser dancing, where it becomes impossible to trace the line between the serious and the ludicrous. We could take a short tale like "Tobold (II)", where Walser / Tobold narrates his experience as a servant in a castle. At the end of the tale Tobold is dismissed without a reason, just because he is no longer needed. The description recalls what might happen today to many of us. Walser / Tobold speaks of his dismissal almost absent-mindedly: "Soon after the count set off on a journey, and since my services were no longer required, which was politely pointed out to me, I took leave of the castle. They were kind enough to write a reference in which, among other things, it was stated that I was extremely reliable and no less industrious and honest; naturally this attestation delighted me."³¹² It sounds like someone who has just finished an unpaid internship in a gallery in London. Someone completely uncritical towards the dismissal and the whole situation. It is more than uncritical, it is almost idiotic, and this makes us suspect that Walser may be proceeding ironically here; we read some more and the suspicion is reinforced: "I'm really someone now. Come what may, I'll meet it head-on, try my strength against it, face it optimistically, forthrightly. I feel ready to take on the entire world, or at least half of it." Again, this could be a parody of what the intern is asked to tell to himself between one internship and the next. To feel great and powerful and full of joy after having spent months of your life polishing chandeliers in a castle or serving tea at Victoria Miro Gallery: it's totally ridiculous.

But at the same time in this Tobold II Walser goes on and on about the delightfulness of being a servant and polishing chandeliers, in such a way and to such an extent that you think he is really convinced. At the same time you feel there is something wrong in all this, something disconcerting in this celebration of the servant. This short tale is different from *Jacob von Gunten* where we are given further means to distinguish between serving and serving, between a servant as a perfect zero and an *almost* perfect zero. Here Walser's doubling comes close to nothing: is there a doubling at all? Walser presents himself as someone who "truly" enjoys the dull, menial job he is undertaking,

³¹² Walser "Tobold (II)", p. 99.

the lowest of all, as someone that “truly” undertakes his job in the most efficient way possible, at the cost of any interior life at all (you have not a self anymore, you become the same chandeliers that you polish every evening...). In my notes in the margin of the book I have irritably written “bullshit!” several times. But this is part of Walser’s perverse ballet with power.

Often Walser performs a version of how we are required to be, and how we are asked to think. When he philosophises, he uses the most banal “philosophy” taken from magazines and newspapers. “What trivialities I utter, though my words are perhaps, all the same, somewhat too clever and correct! I’m so very sorry.”³¹³ Walser the moralist acts similarly, through an endless flow of opinions, none of them securely grounded. The moral he recommends is trite and conventional, and still there is something unpredictable in his recommendations. “And then the Robber robbed stories in that he was constantly reading those little popular novels and fashioning purely original tales from the contents, laughing all the while.”³¹⁴ Walser writes again not only his everyday life, but also, as part of it, cheap novels, love stories, dull conversations, moralistic discourses taken from pamphlets and mass publications. As if I would write this dissertation using *The Metro* as my source. Frivolous Walser, superficial Walser, tedious Walser, he is doubling all this as well. Indeed he plays the part with such studied diligence that something all of a sudden starts to go wrong.

This is madness, we could say. Yes it is madness, but this madness comes to make something happen. How can I teach as Jacob learns, how can I talk as Walser writes, and even: how can I organize Summer Drafts as Walser would do? I somehow saw this already with the first Summer Drafts, as though Walser and all these other readings exerted a “bad” influence over me. If I cannot get “stronger” as a Walserian cultural organizer, because I don’t become more intelligent or professional, a war machine might get stronger instead. And myself? I can always become a Don Quixote: “Cleverness can’t possibly make me happy, at least not for the time being. Isn’t Don Quixote, in his madness and folly, a truly happy man? I don’t doubt this for a moment. If the Knight of the Doleful Countenance could carry out this mad knight idea, there’s no reason I can’t realize my servant idea, which undoubtedly is every bit as mad, if not

³¹³ Walser, *The Robber*, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

a notch or two madder.”³¹⁵ Not the clever cultural organizer but a foolish knight, a crazy servant, an almost zero, pretending, from time to time, to be a cultural organizer. But this is not easy. Especially when you talk with town councillors in order to get funding. Walser offers us a proposal of a seemingly hyperbolic conformism, even more, of a passionate subjection, not to a master, but to a whole castle, a whole institute, a whole system, a society. Delirious Walser. This is not a liberation from the system, an exodus, an escape: it is the public performance of an excessively enthusiastic submission to it, on the verge of everyday disasters.

But where is the collective dimension of this?

In Walser’s writing of course.

Are you making a fool of me?

“‘It’s just that he can’t help laughing at everything that is good and beautiful, sacrosanct and sensible, and this is what people hold against him, with which they demonstrate only how sentimental they are. Yes, yes, it’s true, most of us today are sentimental.’ With these words they entered the room. ‘Just look what a boyish face he has. Of course, he might perhaps nevertheless be quite a good man all the same’ Frau von Hochberg remarked. ‘Edith, have you forgiven me?’ now came from the lips of the sleeper, in an intonation one almost had to laugh at. He said this in his dream. That is, even in his dreams he had the gall to approach her too closely. She bent over him, took his head, which was hot with fever, in her hand, which he had gazed at so often, and pressed her mouth, which he loved above all else, above all other things, and which had become to him sacrosanct in its own right, upon his. ‘And he never bought me that fur, either. He’s the wickedest man in the whole planet.’”³¹⁶

Even when he sleeps he seems to perform. How could I teach, how could I talk like Walser? I would probably lose my job if I tried. I would break down the coherence of my talk (but to some extent it is already broken, I don’t finish the sentences, the subordinates proliferate, I’m never really sure of what I’m saying...). If I think of Walser as an actor, I should get his confidence on stage, his recklessness, his nonchalance, his heedlessness: I should not be afraid of incoherence (but my students will think I’m an idiot, as many people probably thought Walser was also an idiot). If I

³¹⁵ Walser, “Tobold II”, *op. cit.*, p 82.

³¹⁶ Walser, *The Robber*, *op. cit.*, pp 138.

would write this dissertation as Walser writes I would not pass the viva. And yet, despite its incoherence, Walser's talks hold together. Teaching like Walser would be to perform and to always entangle someone else in a performance. There is a sense of public display in Walser, the creation of something like a public (collective) staging. It might be easy to think teaching as a performance, but what kind of performance would this be? An artistic performance, where students perform as well, it would not be simply myself in front of an audience. Walser performs even when sleepy, for a pedagogy of sleepiness, the clarity of what we say gets confused, our mind numb, delivered over to a dreamlike reasoning.



APPENDIX 12: New Cross drift, rehearsal for a demo

4 Walser / Kleist and action

Walser lives a few months in Thun, working in a brewery, as he tells us at the end of "Kleist in Thun". A hundred years before, Heinrich von Kleist also spent a few months in the same locality. The active and dynamic Kleist finds himself in a place where nothing much could happen. "A beautiful poem, a child, a heroic deed; these three things occupy his mind" when he arrives in Thun. But he won't be able to do anything there.³¹⁷ It might be the astonishing landscape, not inspiring but overwhelming, so that Kleist is unable to get anything done, he tries to write, but nothing. "Lord knows what is wrong. What is the matter with me? It is so beautiful here."³¹⁸ "The faces of the snow-crested mountains are so wan; dominant in all things is a final, intangible beauty. Swans swimming to and fro among the rushes seem caught in the spell of beauty and of the light of dusk. The air is sticky. Kleist wants a brutal war, to fight in battle; to himself he seems a miserable and superfluous sort of person. He goes for a walk. Why, he asks himself with a smile, why must it be he who has nothing to do, nothing to strike at, nothing to throw down?"³¹⁹

³¹⁷ Walser, "Kleist in Thun", in *The Walk and Other Stories*, Serpent's tail, 1992 (also published as *Selected Stories*), p 17

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p 17

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p 19

It is through this inactivity, almost this paralysis of the dynamic Kleist, that a myriad of things start happening: a turmoil of minutiae, barely perceptible, hardly definable. “Read a newspaper? How would that be? Conduct an idiotic political or generally useful debate with some respected official half-wit or other? Yes? He is not unhappy. Secretly he considers happy alone the man who is inconsolable: naturally and powerfully inconsolable. With him the position is one small faint shade worse.”³²⁰ This condition of Kleist seems almost to be a contemporary condition, a dull and pervasive uneasiness, an overwhelming sense of paralysis. For once Kleist finds himself in a situation where he does nothing, and most of all nothing heroic, nothing according to his own disposition: there is almost nothing he can do, walking, swimming in the lake, looking at the landscape or at the villagers on Sunday.

Inaction: it is this absence of significant action that allows for a swarming of Kleist himself, together with everything else around him. In this ‘Kleist in Thun’ we could read something like Walser’s manifesto for political action. The battle goes micro. The heroic warrior stops performing noble “exploits” (*gesta, res gesta* in Latin) and starts making “gestures”. But these are almost involuntary gestures. Walser brings Kleist in Thun again, and this time, as Kleist / Walser, the German writer becomes something else: what would happen if we let the overpowering forces of the world overwhelm us, what happens if we let ourselves be carried away by them, is there a way to let us carry away without perishing? Kleist falls ill, his sister comes to take him away. “My dear, what is the matter, his sister embraces him. Nothing, nothing. That was the ultimate wrong, that he should have to say what was wrong with him.”³²¹ When in the carriage the sister “cautiously plucks up the courage to speak of his taking on some practical activity soon.” Kleist nods, and thinks that, to be honest with himself, he feels good now, “in pain, but well at the same time”.³²²

There is a sense of pending catastrophe in this and other tales by Walser. The catastrophe does not always happen.³²³ It is more often a sort of sustained tension, a suspense, a suspension, which in ‘Kleist in Thun’ is released when the sister comes to

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ *Ibid.*, p 23

³²² *Ibid.*, p 24

³²³ It does happen, for instance, in Walser, *Jakob von Gunten*, op. cit., and in “The Battle of Sempach” in Walser, *Masquerade and Other Stories*, op. cit., pp. 37-42.

the rescue of Kleist (of Walser). It is this possibility of catastrophe that distinguishes Walser's from Agamben's suspension. In "potentiality" the suspension is safe, it is a balancing, the Messiah comes and his passage is painless. Walser's possibility can always hurt, it is violent, it has something of a catastrophe about it, for Kleist as well, Kleist who *also* suffers in Thun, he is "in pain, but well at the same time". It is this sense of a catastrophe that Walser brings about in Deleuze and Guattari's schizo, making it closer to Bataille, and to Debord as well, where the catastrophe is almost manufactured. Walser is an affective activist, and affects are not only joyful. This activism is also a way of constantly dealing with catastrophic forces, with forces of deterritorialization, Deleuze and Guattari would say, forces affecting our bodies. The way Walser deals with these forces is like a challenging game: how can I play with these forces, how can I let them affect myself, to what extent can I put myself in danger – this is something I "play" with, this is what intensifies Walser's writing, where, from the perspective of fact, deed and action, not much seems to take place. This is a game with madness. To play Walser's game we need to sense those forces, we need to let our bodies try to get acquainted with them (I'm fed up of myself! how can I become different, how can I become...). How to collectivize this danger, how can the possibility of a catastrophe be shared and circulate, how can it become something other than an individual pathology (nanopolitics).

What Walser proposes here as politics, as political activism in this text, is "a way of fooling around with your life": "He says something, and then come moments when he is outright happy as a child, and then of course the girl makes a rather severe, punitive face, just to show him a little how very strangely he does fool around with his life. [...] At heart she is naturally glad that he is feeling better. On and on, well well, what a journey it is. But finally one has to let it go, this stagecoach, and last of all one can permit oneself the observation that on the front of the villa where Kleist lived there hangs a marble plaque which indicates who lived and worked there."³²⁴ Here, at the end, Walser "stabs" the reader and the tale (and himself) with a radical change of tone. He talks about those who may come to read the inscription. "A Jew can read it, a Christian too, if he has the time and if his train is not leaving that very instant, a Turk, a swallow, insofar as she is interested, I also, I can read it again if I like. Thun stands at the entrance to the Bernese Oberland and it is visited every year by thousand of foreigners. I know the region a little perhaps, because I worked as a clerk in a brewery

³²⁴ Walser, "Kleist in Thun", p 24-25.

there. The region is considerably more beautiful than I have been able to describe here, the lake is twice as blue, the sky three times as beautiful. Thun had a trade fair, I cannot say exactly but I think four years ago.”³²⁵ Here ends the “tale”, and for some reason this ending makes me feel like crying, this is what some tales do at the end. Here Walser sharply marks the difference between Politics and micropolitics, between Action (an industrial exhibition, a measurable beauty of the sky, working in a beer company, touristic excursions, knowing a place, races and identities, a memorial inscription) and a different mode of playing with life. He makes us feel the difference not between reality and imagination, but between the narrow reality of the rational, and the dangerous possibilities of facing the forces of life.

5 Snow White, Theatre of the Oppressed, Mujeres Creando (healing)

Mujeres Creando’s “acciones” in the streets of La Paz can be seen as pedagogical acts. Their educational intent is explicit. The engagement with the public is often confrontational, and takes place during the performance. We can call these actions “street theatre” rather than performance: they have their characters, even if there is little narrative there is always at the least an actress, impersonating the stereotype of the white upper class Bolivian lady. This character could be seen as the “oppressor”, but also as incarnating the bourgeois values, with their machista and bigoted morality. Maria carries a child on her shoulders, throws buckets of blood on the pavement of a public square, on the feet of the policemen, and the bourgeois lady addresses Maria’s insane acts, she functions as a mediator between the performance and the public, asking people to take a stance, with or against her, with or against the police, with or against Maria. “It’s thanks to the very democracy you are criticising that you are allowed do the ‘scandal’ you are doing!” shouts the lady wearing hut, gloves and fur. When the police grabs Maria to take her away, the public reacts strongly, some people try to talk with the police, they talk to each other.

Before starting the PhD I joined an acting course for beginners at Citylit. When, during the first session, I was asked, as everybody else, my motivations for being there, I said “because of my PhD”. The teacher was proud of that, I think. All the others were there to make a career as TV actors. Yes, it was because of the PhD, and it was also because I

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p 25.

believed that with this course I would learn how to act better every single day: at work, whilst looking for a job, in social occasions (but acting what, and how, acting like a TV actor...). I don't know if the course was useful for my classmates to become TV stars, what I know is that it didn't have much effect on my everyday social "performances". My consideration was that a course is not enough, I had to practice constantly in order to learn how to act every day. We were supposed to prepare a short performance for the end of the course. I chose a passage from a piece by Dario Fo. When I read it in class the teacher said: "Good, interesting... you have a dead-pan face, this is a good quality for an actor." I went back home and I asked my flatmate: "Harry, what does it mean, dead-pan?" "It means inexpressive my dear." I never went back to that course (my career as a TV star got demolished).

And yet, even though Dario Fo is everything but dead-pan, we could say that the expressiveness of his theatre is not really human. The grotesque of his *commedia dell'arte* is not coming from an exaggeration of human expressions, but from their removal. In this sense there is a "dead-pan" element in Dario Fo as well, the customary, "natural" expression of human feelings is cleared, the body is freed from it, so that something else can emerge, something like a fiasco of the proper behaviour of a human body. The effects are very different but there is something similar, for instance, in Buster Keaton: a dead-pan face liberates a different, often disastrous expressiveness for the body. "His one and only audition proved a humiliating failure: he was dismissed as wooden and expressionless."³²⁶ In Walser as well there is something along this line, the "I have nothing" generates a performance of disaster, beside the respectability and properness of his figure and his manners (the properness of yourself as a worker, a teacher, an activist).

A few years later I find myself practicing Theatre of the Oppressed, as part of nanopolitics.³²⁷ In the session "Poetics of the Oppressed" of *Theatre of the Oppressed* we can get an overview of the variety of formats that Augusto Boal has created for this theatre.³²⁸ For the nanopolitics sessions we had discussions around traumatic episodes that have happened to us, and then we represented those episodes of oppression by using Boal's techniques. Theatre of the Oppressed directly derives from Paulo Freire's

³²⁶ Coetzee, J. M. "The Genius of Robert Walser". The New York Review of Books, 2 November 2000.

³²⁷ <http://nanopolitics.noblogs.org/>

³²⁸ Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Pluto, 2000.

pedagogy, what they have in common is the raising of an awareness of oppression. Especially with theatre this awareness is not necessarily or entirely rational or conscious, it is an “awareness” that affects our bodies, and oppression is a role we play. Certainly this awareness is not a goal of the Theatre of the Oppressed. But to think ourselves as “oppressed”, here in London, in a place which offers itself as a sort of apotheosis of (neoliberal) “freedom” (there is so much variety, so much to chose, so much to buy, so much to experience, everything for sale), makes us also think about this “freedom”, and the possibility of *practicing* a different one.

Beside “oppression”, an important aspect that Freire and this theatre have in common is the shifting around of the roles of the pedagogue and the learners, the actor and the spectators, the facilitator and the participants. In nanopolitics Nelly facilitates, but she is not really acting as a teacher, what we learn we learn from each other, her task is to pull out of the box some of the Theatre’s tools and help us to use them. This pedagogy is very much based on people, actors, students, and their experiences, fears, desires, but at the same time is even more based on techniques, tools, formats, games. This makes us breathe a sigh of relief: there is much more than us, human beings, here.

The Theatre of the Oppressed moves decidedly from passivity to action, from oppression to liberation, from spectator to actor, from theatre to life. It is a teaching ourselves to live politically through a collective becoming-actor. Here, as in Walser, there is always a context, institutions, a plot. And a kind of violence is produced, a violence eroding ourselves and our everyday patterns, eroding the context, the institutions, the plot. But Walser’s theatre is less decisive (and to take collective decisions is an important feature in the Theatre of the Oppressed), it is more uncertain in its moves. In Walser’s “Snow White” the plot gets twisted even more than the characters, it is the story, the bigger picture, the framework within which everybody is trapped that the characters try to change. What kind of action, liberation and acting, what kind of life is this theatre opening up?

Both Walser’s “Snow White” and Mujeres Creando’s performance deal with traumas. Walser’s through the “fictional” death of Snow White (who is the oppressed, at least in the original tale), the betrayal by the Queen, the rescue by the Prince. In Maria’s performance the trauma is the assassination of numerous Bolivian citizens under the dictatorship of Hugo Banzer. Here we have three models of political and pedagogical

theatre: Mujeres Creando's street theatre, Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, Robert Walser's theatre exemplified in "Snow White" (Walser's "Snow White" is written as a theatrical piece).³²⁹

There was perhaps a sort of retroactive echo of Boal in the idea of changing my life by joining an acting course: there is no separation between life and theatre, reality and fiction are in continual communication, this is the foundation of Theatre of the Oppressed. Said otherwise, this time with Guy Debord: we could say of our life that it is entirely fictional and spectacular, theatre has become the medium for social (and political) interaction. Boal himself says: "All the methods that I have discussed are forms of a rehearsal-theatre, and not of spectacle-theatre." From "spectacle" to "rehearsal" there is a doubling gesture. For Boal action is action, whether it takes place as part of a theatrical representation or as a "real" riot: "the poetics of the oppressed focuses on the action itself: the spectator delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or to think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonist's role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change – in short, trains himself for real action. In this case perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution. The liberated spectator, as a whole person, launches into action. No matter that the action is fictional, what matters is that it is action!"³³⁰ The Theatre of the Oppressed is a theatre wherein the spectator becomes an actor – I try out alternative performances for myself and the people around me.

This is also a rehearsal inasmuch as the same situation is repeated several times. I can see myself in the situation from the outside, I can perform it once over myself, I can propose changes to it, I can improvise, together with the others. It is a rehearsal of what has happened and what is going to be. We can discuss and analyse the situation together and we take the time to do this, again and again. We can see ourselves in the situations of others and we can start perceiving these situations as something other than merely private and personal, as they first appeared to be ("Breaking the repression").³³¹ When back outside, after nanopolitics, we will have returned to ourselves, but something of this collective training will remain with us. Pushed to an extreme, this rehearsing erodes

³²⁹ Robert Walser, "Snow White", in *Robert Walser Rediscovered*, Dartmouth College, 1985, pp. 101-135.

³³⁰ Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, *op. cit.*, p 122.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, p 150.

the separation between “real” murders under a dictatorship and the “fictional” murder of Snow White.

In *Mujeres Creando* the spectator tends to remain a spectator. And yet the latter is nonetheless activated, not as an actor, but through an affective uproar that is everything but disciplined by any acting technique. In *Mujeres Creando*'s videos you can sometimes see people screaming, crying, losing control. This theatre is not based on rehearsal, it is confrontational, attempting to shake the public violently. It is also educational, in a way it acts on people's “awareness” in a more direct way (the crimes of the NGO's, the female stereotype of the mass media, are sometimes represented). When a theatrical role is employed, like the bourgeois lady, these are stable and easily identifiable. *Mujeres Creando*'s “actions” work as a representational theatre that has to be experienced, and not tried out by the public. It is also a theatre that “acts” on an affective level: *Mujeres Creando*'s pedagogy makes use of symbols and representations, encompassing the public at the same time.

Walser's “Snow White” is a theatrical piece, and it is one of the few texts written by Walser within which he does not seem in one way or another to appear. There is no alter ego of Walser here, instead we have the characters appearing in Snow White, the fairytale. The dwarfs are missing, as well as the enchanted mirror and any other supernatural element. There are only people in Walser's Snow White: the Queen, Snow White, the Prince, the Hunter.

The Brothers Grimm's *Snow White* is a story of hate, jealousy, pity, cruelty, resentment, revenge, it is a story of love and hate, of good and evil, it is a dramatic story, a story of life and apparent death, of life passing through death and returning to life.

Walser's Snow White is a story of love, hate and passion, and a story of life, of coming back to life, and of death as something that makes life tremble. Walter Benjamin places “Snow White” at the core of his essay on Walser, describing it as “one of the profoundest products of modern literature, and one which is enough on its own to explain why this seemingly most fanciful of all writers should have been a favourite author of the inexorable Franz Kafka.”³³² For Benjamin, Snow White is the place where

³³² Benjamin, “Robert Walser” in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, Part 1, Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 259.

“the process of healing” that characterizes Walser openly emerges. “If we were to attempt to sum up in a single phrase the delightful yet also uncanny element in them [in Walser’s figures], we would have to say: *they have all been healed.*”³³³ We can read Snow White as a process of healing, in the sense of a coming back to life which is not a resurrection once and for all, but a continuous struggle for life to vibrate, not in opposition with death, but together with death, that is, together with the possibility of its own fragility, of its fundamental collapse (in the original tale Snow White fights, or dances with death not once, but several times, repeatedly, throughout the story). We should understand this healing as an endless process, not as driven by the goal of being healthy, one day soon. Benjamin suggests that this “healing”, this vibration and shining of life in its fragility, is everywhere in Walser and becomes apparent in “Snow White”.

There is another sense of this “healing” here, that Benjamin probably points towards. Healing is the overcoming of a state – illness, suffering, trauma – so as to leave it behind. Something has happened, and healing is the process of recovering from this something. Death has taken place, a familiar tragedy has occurred, where a mother comes to hate the daughter to the point of killing her. There are other less perceptible “traumas” here, that Walser nonetheless deals with: the trauma of Snow White treated as a love object by the Prince, who brings her to the castle in her coffin to contemplate her beauty. In the original tale it is a servant, fed up with having to carry the coffin around, who angrily hits Snow White on the back, so that the poisoned bite falls out of her throat. No kisses at all in the Grimm Brothers. Hence, for Walser’s Snow White there is also the “trauma” of being chosen by a Prince through a gesture that she cannot reciprocate: “Oh, had I only left you there! How fair you were, so still and white, like snow upon the wintry world.” Snow White: “Snow? Always snow?”³³⁴ In Walser the Prince is a silly boy who falls in love with the Queen after seeing her kissing the Hunter. Snow White is not really in love with him, more often she is simply annoyed by the Prince.

If healing is a way of re-covering, it implies in a certain sense a form of doubling, of repeating something in such a way that something else begins to take (its) place. This is what Walser does with “Snow White”: clearly the story has already taken place, Snow White and the Queen, the Prince and the Hunter. In Walser the four characters find

³³³ *Ibid.*, p 259.

³³⁴ Walser, “Snow White”, op. cit., p 120.

themselves on stage as if they are waking up from a bad dream, from the horrible story that has just happened to them. “To read again what has never happened”, says Benjamin (and Agamben after him). Benjamin adds: “Walser begins where the fairy tales stop.”³³⁵ To act again what has never happened to us, to act differently what has been settled as history, as fairytale. This acting is a sort of light-hearted struggle, a struggle with myself and with what has happened to us. A struggle that could be defined, in Benjamin’s terms, as something “marked by... a consistently heartrending, inhuman superficiality”, a “neglected” struggle, too tenuous to get a clear grasp of, a struggle characterized by a “chaotic scatteredness.”³³⁶ The trauma becomes not a specific episode in our biography, but a collective pathology protracted in time: to struggle with it we need something other than doctors with a clear diagnosis, we need an “inhuman”, “superficial”, continuous healing process.

Acting becomes a “process of healing”, a being healed of the story itself, of our individuation, the rigidity of a series of interchangeable roles that we are asked to adopt one after the other. The centrality of healing in Benjamin offers a connection for “Snow White” with a clinical practice of schizoanalysis. There is something from which we are cured, and this is also “ourselves”: we do not cure ourselves to become eventually healthy, or to become eventually happy, like in a fairytale (the fairytale psychologists wave under our nose). Walser’s “Snow White” certainly ends more happily than the Grimm’s tale, where the Queen is forced to wear white-hot iron shoes and dance to death, but the difference is that Walser’s Snow White has no end. Towards the very end, when the healing process seems to be on the verge of resolution, the Queen, almost inadvertently or by mistake, starts reciting a sentence pronounced at the beginning: “And then – then I submit we should Remind ourselves – How shall I put – What do I say? Ah, yes, then say, As by coincidence one day: ‘you goaded him with fiery kisses to the – ’”³³⁷ (to take it up again from the beginning). The Queen distractedly regurgitates again bits of herself, of her story. Snow White interrupts her mother: “Oh please, be silent, please, it was The tale said this, not you and never I. I said so once, once thus – That is all over. Father’s here, accompany us all inside.”³³⁸

³³⁵ Benjamin, “Robert Walser” op. cit., p 260.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 259 and 257

³³⁷ Walser, “Snow White”, op. cit., p 135.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

Schizoanalysis as a healing process with no ends, it is a reading again, an acting out again of what appeared to us as unmovable. Walser's text does not offer programmatic instruction, we have to get close to it to take it up as an example. Following Benjamin, we could say that Walser's writings have "the pure and vibrant mood of the convalescent. [...] For no one enjoys like a convalescent. The enjoyment of the convalescent has nothing of the orgy about it. His reinvigorated blood courses toward him from mountain streams, and the purer breath of his lips flows down from the treetops. Walser's character share this childlike nobility with the characters of the fairy tales, who likewise emerge from the night and from madness."³³⁹ ("I was dead, and now it is as if someone had raised me up and set me on my way."³⁴⁰ Walser's convalescence, his process of healing, is the emergence of enjoyment from madness. It is a schizoanalytic process where our repressed "madness" becomes "enjoyment", where "madness" is the capacity of finding ourselves in the middle of "enjoyment", in the middle of desire as our running blood mingles together with a mountain stream, our breath with a gust of wind that flows down the treetops.

Schizoanalysis is a healing process, not the healing of a schizophrenic subject cured from schizophrenia, of Walser recovering in an asylum from a schizophrenia diagnosis. It is a process of liberation from coercions that stiffen our bodies. Education itself can become a process of healing without a cure, where the teacher, or Walser, acts as a facilitator, a joker, a fool, in order to upset an established propriety that is itself pathological (Toret).

Benjamin explains the importance of the "how" in Walser: writing in a certain way is what matters, the "content" of what Walser writes becomes almost indifferent. We need to refer to the original German, or to Agamben's translation of Benjamin's essay on Walser, collected in *Ombre Corte*, to understand the importance of this "how" (the English translation, generally weak, makes a mess of this passage): "For Walser the 'how' of his work is so important that all he has to say withdraws completely in front of the importance of writing. It could be said that what he has to say gets exhausted in the writing."³⁴¹ Walser exhausts what he says in the "how": can this become a pedagogical

³³⁹ Walter Benjamin, "Robert Walser", *op. cit.*, 259.

³⁴⁰ Walser, "The Walk" in *The Walk and Other Stories*, Serpent's Tail, 1992, p 66.

³⁴¹ It might be from this passage that Agamben gets the idea of "exhaustion" related to Walser's language. My translation from the Italian in Walter Benjamin, *Ombre corte*, Einaudi, 1993, edited and translated by Agamben. This is the English translation: "Walser is so little concerned with the way in which he writes

method, from reading to learning, exhausting the contents by a way of saying, reading, learning? Exhausting the possibilities for knowledge to be significant, so that something else emerges (Deleuze / Beckett performing exhaustion rather than Agamben declaring us exhausted)?³⁴²

Benjamin defines Walser's writing method as continually being on the verge of disaster, desperation, oblivion, self-doubt. Walser's is not a redemptive language, but a disastrous one, the possibility of a disaster that is healing, of a "cure" that entertains a different way of handling our desubjectivation. "Scarcely has he taken up his pen than he is overwhelmed by a mood of desperation. Everything seems to be on the verge of disaster; a torrent of words pours from him in which the only point of every sentence is to make the reader forget the previous one. When in the course of a virtuoso piece he transforms Schiller's monologue 'Along this narrow pathway must he come' into prose, he begins with the classic words, 'Along this narrow pathway'. But then his Wilhelm Tell is overcome by self-doubt, appears weak, insignificant, lost. He continues, 'along this narrow pathway must he come, I think'."³⁴³ Walser is unsure, forgetful, distracted, but his hesitations are not close to an inner self, they are superficial hesitations, unfastening from the self, proliferating. This forgetfulness is not mine anymore, and it is something that does not stop my talking, I talk not *despite* my hesitations, but *through* hesitations, not because I have to talk, but because through these hesitations I cannot stop talking, cannot stop writing. A doubling of uncertainty and weakness, from what makes me a teacher or a student, uncertain of myself, to uncertainty as the component of a pedagogical method, and a healing process. From myself stuttering in class, to a stuttering of the class: "An affective, intensive language, and not an affection [or pathology] of the one who speaks."³⁴⁴ From an individual deterritorialization, that makes us fragile, uncertain and stuttering, we shift to a proliferating one, fragility, uncertainty and stuttering without subjects and perimeters – a deterritorialization that corrodes the axiomatic framework.

And... there is more to "Snow White." The impossibility of writing on Walser: it is impossible to create an abridged version of "Snow White", cutting and pasting bits and

that everything other than what he has to say recedes into the background. We could claim that what he has to say is exhausted in the process." Benjamin, "Robert Walser", *op. cit.*, p 258.

³⁴² See also chapter one: Deleuze, "The Exhausted", *op. cit.*

³⁴³ Benjamin, "Robert Walser", *op. cit.*, p 258.

³⁴⁴ Deleuze, "He Stuttered", in Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, *op. cit.*, p 107.

pieces, because Walser's tale is already structured as such, a constant slipping of the action, the acting, the characters and their story. All this is crazy, Benjamin talks of Walser's "madness", but this is not the madness of the man. The characters struggle to get away from how things are, to change the framework, to unlock the setting, and, through speech, they try out countless options, so that different possibilities emerge in the interstices of these never ending volte-faces. "All this is but a game, you know", says the Queen right after she orders the Hunter to kill Snow White, in a re-enactment of the episode.³⁴⁵

And... amongst many things "Snow White" is a "Poor Theatre" (Grotowski), implying as it does a strange passivity which releases impulses through the body. "The process itself, though to some extent dependent upon concentration, confidence, exposure, and almost disappearance into the acting craft, is not voluntary. The requisite state of mind is a passive readiness to realize an active role, a state in which one does not 'want to do that' but rather 'resigns from not doing it'."³⁴⁶ To remove an apparatus of expression makes something happen throughout the body, forces pull it in different directions, the voice sobs, shaken by hiccups, and the body is trained to allow this kind of struggle to happen.

And... amongst many things, Snow White is also the white snow where Walser dies, in the film poster of Joao Cesar Monteiro's *Branca de Neve*, in the apparently neglected or involuntary choreography where once again Walser is the protagonist, Walser, or a whatever man, dropped dead in the snow of a Christmas day.³⁴⁷ The film begins with Walser dead, and ends with Monteiro, alive, looking at us, under a tree. The voices of the four actors emerge from darkness, from a black screen, pierced now and then by the blue sky above Walser. The characters not only fail to clearly perform their roles, but begin to merge with one another. In *Branca de Neve* the actors flatten the incertitude of Walser's characters with their smooth and soft reciting, but the black screen introduces a different register of disorientation. Who is speaking? Who is who? Monteiro subtracts from Snow White every means for us to make sense of it, save for the specificity of the different voices, that itself recedes. Monteiro does not renounce this challenge of

³⁴⁵ Walser, "Snow White", *op. cit.*, p 122.

³⁴⁶ Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Simon and Shuster, New York, 1968, p. 17.

³⁴⁷ Monteiro, *Branca de Neve*, Mandragoa Filmes / Gemini Films, 2000.

writing Walser again, but abandons, through a gesture of severity, the very visuality of the cinematic form.

Amongst many things, “Snow White” is also a “simultaneous dramaturgy”, a theatrical representation wherein the actors are asked by the spectators to change the course of the story, to try out different paths for the same characters: their story is repeated, again and again, always different.³⁴⁸ In the Theatre of the Oppressed the actors are not only actors, they are also people who need to take decisions, “How do I carry on?” There is a discrepancy between actors and people acting. “Snow White” is a story of oppression, and what is oppressing here is the story itself, it is something that constitutes the characters, making them act as they did, shaping their subjectivity. Boal himself, today, has to be liberated, and liberation is a process, it is not liberation from something, not liberation as an achievement, and not even in opposition with oppression. Snow White is a “forum theatre”, where *spectators* try out different possibilities of a story.³⁴⁹ Snow White is a “newspaper theatre”, it does not try to reveal the truth behind a story, it undermines its truth, and any other possible truth at stake in the performance.³⁵⁰ Snow White is a “photo-romance”, not so much as a disclosure of an ideology behind the tale, but as a discrepancy between the tale and what is re-enacted. “The technique here consists in reading to the participants the general lines in the plot of a photo-romance without telling them the source of this plot.” It is like acting without knowing that what we act is a fairy tale (carelessness, distraction, sleepiness...).³⁵¹

To take up again a theatre of the oppressed today, and make it work as it once worked in the ‘60s in Brazil? “Here the cathartical effect is entirely avoided. We are used to plays in which the characters make the revolution on stage and the spectators in their seats feel themselves to be triumphant revolutionaries. Why make a revolution in reality if we have already made it in the theatre? But that does not happen here: the rehearsal stimulates the practice of the act in reality. Forum theatre, as well as these other forms of a people’s theatre, instead of taking something away from the spectator, evokes in him a desire to practise in reality the act he has rehearsed in the theatre. The practice of these theatrical forms creates a sort of uneasy sense of incompleteness that seeks

³⁴⁸ Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-134.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 139-142.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 143.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 147-149.

fulfilment through real action.”³⁵² It is precisely such fulfilment, the aim of which is to correct this “uneasy sense of incompleteness”, that is entirely absent from Walser’s text.

6 Walser’s schizo-walk

It is this “incompleteness” that differentiates Walser not only from Boal, but also from Debord, and especially from Debord as he appears in *The Coming Community*, in such a way that Walser almost disappears from it. It is this incompleteness, the incompleteness of healing, of a performance or of a simple walk, that distinguishes Walser from (Agamben’s) Debord, that marks the difference between Walser’s walk and Debord’s *dérive*, practiced as a way of developing a different relationship between the self and the city. In Walser there is no development, there is no sense of a (psychogeographical) building up, there is not a project leading to the production of a different us in a different city. Walser’s “relationship” is always incomplete, precarious, ephemeral, and most importantly is not a relation between himself and the city, himself and the landscape: everything gets scattered, multiplies and reverberates beyond the terms of such a distinction, on entirely different scales, levels and planes.

We could read “The Walk” as Walser’s manifesto for a practice of walking, which is also a practice of writing. Not in the sense that Walser needs to walk in order to get material for his writing, but because writing and walking in Walser at times can no longer be separated. Walser as a writing machine, as a walking machine, as a war machine... “‘But you’re always to be seen out for a walk!’ ‘Walk,’ was my answer, ‘I definitely must, to invigorate myself and to maintain contact with the living world, without perceiving which I could not write the half of one more single word, or produce the tiniest poem in verse or prose.’”³⁵³ Walser’s walking / writing is a wandering around and about, without an aim or an end. The streets he describes are flowing, but the walk is turning all the time, the writing punctuated by encounters with houses, people, landscapes, animals, even giants. “There accompanies the walker always something remarkable [...], he welcomes all curious and peculiar phenomena, becomes their friend and brother, because they delight him; he makes them into formed and substantial bodies, gives them structure and soul just as they for their part instruct and inspire

³⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.

³⁵³ Walser, “The Walk”, op. cit. p 85.

him.”³⁵⁴ This centrality of the encounter, not just intended as something that happens, but also as a material encounter, distinguishes Walser’s walk from a situationist *dérive*. Debord is preoccupied with the construction of a *dérive*, with a different determination of the city and the creation of another urban setting. To which Walser would say: yes, that’s interesting, I met someone like that...

This is the task of the walker / writer: to affect and be affected through encounters. This is a walk of miniature encounters – minute, delicate, light. We develop a capacity to walk, to affect and be affected by the minutiae we come across, by the minutiae of what is not necessarily minute in itself, “since, when I’m out walking, any notions, flashes of light, and lightning flashes quite of their own accord intrude and interrupt, to be carefully pondered upon.”³⁵⁵ There is no aim in Walser, just an inexhaustible act of walking, a practice of liberation of the self from itself, of the world from the world.

In this sense Walser’s walk is closer to Deleuze and Guattari’s “schizo’s walk”, than to a situationist walk. “A schizophrenic out in a world is a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst’s couch. A breath of fresh air, a relationship with the outside world. [...] There is no such thing as either a man or nature now, only a process that produces the one within the other and couples the machines together. Producing-machines, desiring-machines everywhere, schizophrenic machines, all of species life: the self and the non-self, outside and inside, no longer have any meaning whatsoever.”³⁵⁶ And in Walser: “Mysteriously and secretly there prowl at the walker’s heels all kinds of beautiful subtle walker’s thoughts, such as make him stand in his ardent and regardless tracks and listen, so that he will be again and again confused and startled by curious impressions and bewitchings of spirit power, and he has the feeling that he must sink all of a sudden into the earth, or that before his dazzled, bewildered thinker’s and poet’s eyes an abyss has opened. His head wants to fall off, and his otherwise so lively arms and legs are as benumbed. Countryside and people, sounds and colours, faces and farms, clouds and sunlight swirl all around him like diagrams, and he must ask himself: ‘Where am I?’”³⁵⁷ Walser continues with this description of the “chaos”, of the “disappearing order” that necessarily surrounds the deranged walker.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p 69.

³⁵⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, op. cit., p3.

³⁵⁷ Walser, “The Walk”, op. cit., p 87.

But to quote Walser is impossible, because this writing machine is designed as a continuity, no doubt fragmented, yet without possible pauses. If I isolate a point, a quotation, an episode, I most probably lose the sense of turning, moving. What emerges, at some specified point, as a delirious description, becomes schizo only in a succession of turnings, as an incessant unfolding, where the self folds together with something else. “I was no longer myself, I was another, and yet it was on this account that I became properly myself.”³⁵⁸ All these points should be written again together with a myriad of others, in themselves they are nothing or very little, insignificant: a bookshop and its shopkeeper, a bank and an officer, a bakery, two little kids, a woman who looks like an actress, a fashion shop, a butcher, a giant named Tomzack, a young singer, Miss Aebi, a tailor, a tax collector, a landscape, a tree, a ruined house, a dog, an elegant man, a worker, the writer Brentano, an inn, a bunch of flowers, this is a list of some of the encounters that occur on this walk. “I think it, if I may say so, well and good when from time to time two persons who are unacquainted freely and harmlessly converse, for which converse we inhabitants of this wandering curious planet, which is a puzzle to us, do, when all is said and done, possess mouth and tongue and linguistic capacity, which last is a matter of fact both curious and fair.”³⁵⁹

These conversations with unacquainted people is what I would like to practice myself, despite of the difficulties I find, we find... I cannot help trying to get from Walser some pedagogical recommendations, as if he was my teacher. This is taking Walser literally, but Walser is actually unsure, forgetful, distracted, not easy to be treated as such... What does Walser “say” beyond the advice he utters, through the movements, torsions and folds that his walking and writing produces? Walser’s pedagogy emerges differently from different readings. A pedagogy of the walk: we can think of applying it, walking around and talking with people. This aspect of the Walk is a pedagogical methodology that implies a sociality, a certain way of relating with people. Walser is not scared of walking around and talking with people. To go into a bookshop and talk with the shopkeeper becomes something like an adventure. There is risk and danger in this adventure, and of course excitement. Here as well Walser seems to double us, doubling a stifled sociality, often suffocated by fear or regulated by trade, by an economy which gives ground to such relations in order to capitalize upon them. Restaurants, barbershops, beauty centers, become places where a caring sociality is

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p 90.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p 66.

something to buy, and something the worker is asked to provide.³⁶⁰ Walser doubles this commercial sociality of customer-care by turning the standard encounters with a shopkeeper or a tailor into peculiar skirmishes.

A different sociality is what Ivan Illich puts forward with his “conviviality”, with the proposal to de-professionalize human relationships.³⁶¹ Today, even more than in the ‘70s when Illich was writing on conviviality, sociability gets professionalized. “The Age of Professions will be remembered as the time when politics withered, when voters guided by professors entrusted to technocrats the power to legislate needs, the authority to decide who needs what and a monopoly over the means by which these needs shall be met. It will be remembered as the Age of Schooling, when people for one-third of their lives were trained how to accumulate needs on prescription and for the other two-thirds were clients of prestigious pushers who managed their habits. It will be remembered as the age when recreational travel meant a packaged gawk at strangers, and intimacy meant training by Masters and Johnson; when formed opinion was a replay of last night’s talk-show, and voting an endorsement to a salesman for more of the same.”³⁶² It might be surprising to see Illich in a section on schizo-walking: his appearance will help us to deal with the “sociality” of Walser’s walk, registering its difference from a (pedagogical) method based on “conviviality”, on a sense of human harmony, agreement and concord, which might have its ascendant in a Christian vision of heaven.

There is little sociability left outside “professionalism” today, there is little of our life that a “profession” does not subsume. Sociability needs to serve a market that co-opts affections, a market of care, relying on the work of nursing carers, social workers, prostitutes, and teachers as well (but these are just the professions that more evidently make use of affects and sociability). De-schooling society is part of Illich’s project to de-professionalize sociability, in other words, to have done with capitalism and with a production of sociability shaped by capital. “The most radical alternative to school would be a network or service which gave each man the same opportunity to share his

³⁶⁰ See for instance Emma Dowling, “Producing the Dining Experience. Measure, Subjectivity and the Affective Worker”, in *Ephemeria*, volume 7(1): 117-132, debating Negri and Hardt’s notion of “affective labour”, and providing the analysis of a working experience in a restaurant as a case study. <http://www.ephemeraweb.org/journal/7-1/7-1dowling.pdf>

³⁶¹ Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, Marion Boyars, 1990.

³⁶² Illich, *The Right to Useful Unemployment*, Marion Boyars Publishers, 1978, pp 46-47.

current concern with others motivated by the same concern.”³⁶³ In Illich passions and concerns become regulated: everything “works” neatly in a world after capitalism. At bottom humans are good, it is a matter of getting together again, leaving capitalism behind, and proceeding to paradise. I am reducing Illich’s thought to something like its parody: this is not to discredit his brilliant analysis, but to give voice to my own visions of a paradise on earth where people hold hands – a vision I carry with me since I was a child. This vision can become an aspiration, a utopian aspiration. Instead of suppressing it, we could further unbridle it as a vision and an aspiration, in such a way that it loses its utopian coherence: utopia subjected to an acceleration that deterritorializes it. The paradise on earth of brothers and sisters loving each other turns into the possibility of future encounters, not necessarily human, not necessarily loving, not necessarily gratifying.

Walser’s walk offers a different model from Illich. This is something Agamben, in his own way, registers as well in “Ethics”.³⁶⁴ In Walser humans are neither good nor bad, they are not even the protagonists of their encounters. There is something else taking place, there are bodies rather than humans, bodies that cannot always be reduced to something human (Agamben calls them “demons”).

What we learn from Walser, and this is the “irreparable” incompatibility with Agamben, is that these encounters are neither good nor bad, yes, but they are not “balanced” either. They are anything but balanced or suspended: everything can happen, even in a bookshop, and what happens can be also threatening. This possible danger, together with every other possible, is what Walser continuously faces, not as a hero, but “as if” he were one. Even in the most banal situations, a range of not necessarily safe possibilities gets open.

“It is not a question of judging other existing beings, but of sensing whether they agree or disagree with us, that is, whether they bring forces to us, or whether they return us to the miseries of war, to the poverty of the dream, to the rigors of organization.”³⁶⁵

³⁶³ Illich, *Deschooling Society*, Penguin, 1970, p 26.

³⁶⁴ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, *op. cit.*, pp 43-45.

³⁶⁵ Deleuze, “To Have Done with Judgement”, in *Essays Critical Clinical*, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

It's also a matter of going back or going... somewhere else. Conviviality might imply a going back to the good days when people used to share a bond of sorts. In Walser there are no bonds, there might be a recurrence of a frequentation. If traditional bonds get undone in a post-fordist society, instead of recuperating them, let's create something else amongst us, some other ways of relating to each other. A politics of people and their physical presence is insufficient today. A war machine is not just comprised of people, and it is not made of people maintaining their communal presence at all times.³⁶⁶ The (dis)functioning of the machine affects our bodies and this affection opens the possibility of creating a different kind of "bond", a different kind of care for each other.

"Rather, he is like a pure and immeasurable multiplicity, the pack, an irruption of the ephemeral and the power of metamorphosis. *He unties the bond just as he betrays the pact.* He brings a *furor* to bear against sovereignty, a celerity against gravity, secrecy against the public, a power (puissance) against sovereignty, a machine against the apparatus. He bears witness to another kind of justice, one of incomprehensible cruelty at times, but at others of unequaled pity as well (because he unties bonds..). He bears witness, above all, to other relations with women, with animals, because he sees all things in relations of *becoming*, rather than implementing binary distributions between "states": a veritable becoming-animal of the warrior, a becoming-woman, which lies outside dualities of terms as well as correspondences between relations. In every respect, the war machine is of another species, another nature, another origin than the State apparatus."³⁶⁷

Walking Walser is also a pre-figuration of today's "nomadic" times, of our restlessness. I could list the cities where I have been living in the last twenty years, those of my friends, the jobs I have changed, and the hundred things we find ourselves doing at the same time, in different places. This is the case not just for myself and my middle class friends, but also for my migrant (middle class) friends in Bolzano. This is not really nomadism, it might be rather (self)exploitation and participation in a globalized job market. Walser's restlessness is different. He doesn't go very far in his walks, and even when he doesn't move at all, there is still an "errancy", a restlessness that is not an inner

³⁶⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, "Nomadology: The War Machine" in *A Thousand Plateaus*, *op. cit.* See also Appendix 10.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p 352.

condition (I am restless), nor an outside condition (the living or working conditions force me to move and change), it is an errancy produced through encounters that can happen here and now. It is always desire that puts us on the move: to go away from my city, away from my country, away from myself, to get a sense of breathing again a bit, a sense of freedom... It might be interesting to ask what happens to this desire, in its folding and unfolding. In Walser this desire produces erosions, micro fissures, it is violent, in its own way: it does not follow prefabricated channels, it acts insistently on every element encountered.

From conviviality to transversality: it could be said that in both a totality is taken in consideration, the totality of the world, no one excluded, and the totality of the institution (La Borde), no one excluded (La Borde as a psychiatric institution extends far beyond its walls). Conviviality, (representative) democracy and conflict resolution, the (bourgeois) aim is to live “peacefully” together (to leave the bourgeois life and its privileges untouched). There is an assumption of horizontality in this: we are all human beings, we are all equal, we are all brothers... Transversality aims at unlocking both the hierarchy of the vertical and the homogenization of the horizontal. It might be something else than de-professionalization, professions are still there in some form, people shift roles, doctors cleans toilets, cooks give injections, the fixity of professions is eroded. Guattari at La Borde was compiling every week “the grid”, a sheet assigning different roles to the staff. All this might sound brilliant and exciting, but transversality is also painful, people at La Borde were often unhappy, recalcitrant, protesting against Guattari: the grid created “considerable tension”, and not the harmonious environment that at first I visualized in my mind. These “tensions” were part of a transversal experiment; a “regulatory instrument for deregulating an institution”, they were part of a therapeutic experiment that people saw as “a way for Guattari to attack and test this or that inhibition or phobia.”³⁶⁸ Conviviality is a suspension of hierarchies, transversality is an animated and continuous countering and undoing of not only hierarchies but the pretensions of horizontality.

Neither conviviality nor transversality operate according to existing lines of affinity. With conviviality, at least in its ecumenical declination, there is the assumption that everyone would eventually become part of a universal community, regardless of class, race, gender or other social distinctions: the affinity is a result. Transversality, on a

³⁶⁸ Francois Dosse, *Deleuze and Guattari Intersecting Lives*, Columbia, 2010, p 57.

social scale, where the institution to be actively and continuously questioned from within is society itself, could see multiple shifts of roles and competences, across social categories (“institutional critique” of a society). The first Summer Drafts could be taken as an example, with the shifting roles of artists, participants, curators, and the improbable huddle it produced, made of old and young people, Italians, Germans, migrants, implausibly sticking together for some time, and not in easy ways. I would also like to read as a case that implies a certain degree of transversality the *indignados* movement in Spain: everybody in the street starts making politics, taking the microphone in turn, hierarchical tendencies are constantly contrasted and undone collectively. In a way the role-shifting is one sided, since the politicians usually watch and carry on doing their own “Politics”, but here there is an openness that does not exclude anyone from participating (even Politicians, and there were some in Madrid).³⁶⁹

The other day I was at Picchio and I was talking about Spain with an old classmate that I hadn't seen for a very long time. The barman says, “Speak with people who were there, it ended up badly in Sol, because vagabonds got into it, and violent kids, and how do you deal with them?” As if saying, democracy from below is a great idea, but there is need of a police, there is need of someone in control to keep the order. “Violent people are often paid by the police or whoever is behind them, I've seen that in London,” I say. And I think about the English mass media, and (middle class) mass media followers, talking about “those violent kids spoiling peaceful demos”. But I also think about some of the young kids in the kettle of Parliament Square, maybe working class kids, kids that you would never see at Goldsmiths. How would you practice conviviality with them? How would you practice transversality? What about encounters with people you would be happy to avoid, like the scary giant Walser describes in “The Walk”? Or much worse than giants, crazy kids in a kettle or smelly homeless people in a tent outside St Paul's: What about a policeman? Walser as well can teach us something: encounters are often violent, of a violence which is not exercised by a subject onto another, it is a (micro) violence that happens in the encounter, and affects more than a body (“You're sexy, you're cute, take off your riot suits” sing the Precarious Workers Brigade in front of a line of blushing policemen). Transversality is a device that deals with desire, affects, intensities: it makes desire circulate, across stratifications, undoing them, in a not always pleasurable way; we might start from a simple device like the shifting of a role.

³⁶⁹ Universidad Nomada, *Democracia distribuida*, Universidad Nomada, 2012
<http://www.universidadnomada.net/spip.php?article382>

In Walser the device (but is there a device in Walser?) does not immediately involve a group of people or a collectivity as in Guattari.

We bourgeoisie have been educated to avoid violence, and especially the micro violence that would endanger us, the stability of our equilibrium. Our education has made us unable to perceive the micro violence exercised on our bodies by the State, the corporations, the neoliberal machinery. We have learned to protect ourselves by blocking the perception of micro violence, and by avoiding the “uncivilized” physical violence committed by people, and reserved to policemen. As Escalate Collective says, we need to “reconfigure our categories of peace and disruption”: “Mainstream media or web-based social media, the message is almost always the same: damn the violent, praise the peaceful. In the bourgeois press, blame takes on a domino effect: the reactionaries say that the TUC are a minority; then the TUC say the activists are a minority; then the liberal non-violent protesters say that the black bloc are a minority. Some in the black bloc condemn throwing paint at McDonalds while children were inside [...] the tactics of both the TUC and the more militant protesters are less egalitarian, radical, disruptive or violent than any of the historical movements praised.”³⁷⁰ “As if” Walser would be a bourgeois, with his elegant manners, his eloquent language, his tact and consideration, his knowledge of proper behavior and etiquette, of ordinary moral debates. No doubt this is true, but at the same time Walser erodes all this from within. (Through Walser) the separation between macro and micro violence gets undone, and violence as a force to be exercised by someone or something onto someone else, according to a structure of domination, has to be countered by violence as a battle of (affective) forces. Walser is “teaching” a desire to overcome a bourgeois fear of violence, to embrace the micro violence of the improbable encounter, training us for a (molecular) revolution.

Walser, as a “professional” writer, deprofessionalizes social relations with his walking method. His method is not based on the encounter of people motivated by similar

370 “We are allowed our ‘right to protest’ only to the extent that it doesn’t infringe those other, more pressing civil rights: first of which is the right of capital to accumulate. A snapshot is in order. The rights of people in central London not to have their day disturbed; the rights of shops in Oxford Street to remain open every minute of the yearly 364 day trading cycle, according to the interests of their shareholders; the rights of consumers to continue consuming unhindered; the rights of motorists not to be discomfited on their journey through town; the rights of businesses to keep their glass fronts pristinely intact; and the rights of everyone looking on from the street or their armchair not to be too unnerved or disturbed by what they see. ‘Of course we recognise their right to protest, but...’. The qualification is a catechism. Protest must be limited so that other and more important rights might be preserved.” Escalate Collective, “Marching for Whose Alternative?” in *Variant*, number 41, Spring 2011, pp 9-10.

concerns. We can see this in “The Walk”, the encounters are never based on similarity and likeness. Walser looks for conversations and confrontations with people he does not know. These conversations entail “freedom and familiarity”, but there is nothing idyllic in them. Walser repeats the performance of someone going to a bookshop to buy a book, dealing with a tailor to have a suit made, making a deposit in a bank, having lunch at the house of a patron. We could read the walk as a manual of sociability where Walser tries out endless modulations in the encounters with different people. There are different characters, different situations, different reactions and attitudes. And there is always something overstated and impudent in these *scenes* (in these “scenes” as fits, rows). All these ordinary matters are discussed, presented, performed “as if” they were terribly important, giving each of them a special intensity. And everything seems to happen in a rather uncontrolled way, although Walser reminds us from time to time of himself as a writer, so as to reassure the reader that everything, or at least something, is under control.

These staged relationships are conflictual: in one way or another, a confrontation takes place, from the irritation of the shopkeeper, to the mocking of Miss Aebi, from the quarrel with the tailor, to the praising of the singer, the tediousness of a conversation with the bank officer, and so on. Those conflicts are made of barely perceptible conflagrations, innumerable variations are proposed and possibilities written, and through each of them something breaks out: beyond a relationship between formally social subjects there comes a micropolitics of the possible.

Walser engages with everything and everyone, and produces an intensification of each encounter. And still, these walks seem very light, they are like flights, as if Walser was not making any effort in engaging with people and things in such an intense way (frivolous Walser). The anti-capitalist struggles intensified in London since October 2010 and because of the student movement, the riots, and the Occupy movement, this intensity, connected to a sense of general mobilization, lasted, I would say, until the end of 2011. It is certainly difficult to measure the intensity of a movement, and there are no objective and scientific tools to validate this measurement. Even more questionable could be to compare the intensification of a social movement with the intensification of “a walk”. Can we read the 2010/11 mobilization as a walking, as a series of interconnected Walserian walks, schizo-walks where the acceleration of a deterritorialization, of a desubjectivation, is pushed farther away, beyond, and against,

the axioms of capitalism? The answer is yes, but, someone could say, if Walser's walk is so light, is this true of anti-capitalist struggle, which is tiring, burns people out, pitched against a machine which is always more powerful, and can apparently absorb all opposition without effort? Tiredness of Walser, or maybe exhaustion, a movement is not a big Walk, but a series of interconnected micro walks and encounters.

I go to the picket lines at Goldsmiths a sunny morning during the strike. There is a line with some Visual Cultures tutors, but they talk amongst themselves and I get bored very soon. Next to the main entrance there is another line made of students, some of them are very young. What a difference! This is a crazy picket line, the students jump, shout, clap their hands to people who give up entering the building. I join them, we sign on the wall with a chalk the number of people we prevent entering. This is my first picket line! I didn't really know how a picket line was supposed to work, but it doesn't matter much, I think we are making it up to some extent. At some point a student jumps on the top of the wall, just like that, for no reason, and on such a high wall, we don't know how he managed. He smiles, he is happy, we are all happy. Sometimes the confrontation is harsh, people tell us to "fuck off idiots" and they go through, but the excitement doesn't lessen. There are a couple of us who are especially shimmering, they talk a lot, they are good at convincing people, they are the most animated. Is it because they are more skillful, more eloquent? It might be, but it is not just something they have themselves: this is a collective assemblage.

- But how can you talk of social movements, activism, anti-capitalist struggle, and then refer to such an insignificant example?
- It might be something I'm learning from Walser...
- And this is supposed to be an example of a Walserian walk?
- Yes, an example of Walserian encounter, not so much myself coming across the picket line, but different people coming together, confronting each other.
- But you said above that a Walserian encounter was not just a physical encounter, and this is an example of an ephemeral presence of people being together for a couple of hours.
- Right, but it is also connected with so many other things, some of which appear, even if briefly, in this chapter: Concha and the 15M in Madrid, Concha in Bolzano as part of Summer Drafts, the brief experience with the indignati in Bolzano, the Occupy assemblies at St Paul's every day, the "transition" collective in Bolzano, the demos in London, Collective Futures, the joint symposia in London and Berlin, desuni (desirable

university), and also nanopolitics, as a long series of bodily encounters that from the somatic are still propagating at different levels, nanopolitics as experimenting with a different way of creating “bonds”, different ways of caring for each other, as lightly as Walser does.

And this picket line is also connected with other kinds of less directly “physical” encounters, which might not be written in this thesis: Tahir Square and Olfa’s accounts of the revolution, Silvia Federici, whose lectures I play on youtube as my flatmates play Beyonce (the other day I sent an email to all my Italian friends titled “this is Silvia Federici, and I am in love with her”), Silvia’s encounter with Africa, the Smaschieramenti collective in Bologna that I have not yet met, Rene, Ayreen, and... and... and... and all this doesn’t gravitate around myself, as Walser’s encounters don’t gravitate around himself, but I am and we are - my body is / our bodies are - moved by all this, in different ways and directions, up to the point to have the impression, beyond Walser, that a consistency is materializing.

Walser performs again, there is always something slightly odd in this performance, not in the conversations nor in the “scenes” themselves, but in the way they unfold, in the way they are folded again and again: “With the utmost love and attention the man who walks must study and observe every smallest living thing, be it a child, a dog, a fly, a butterfly, a sparrow, a worm, a flower, a man, a house, a tree, a hedge, a snail, a mouse, a cloud, a hill, a leaf, or no more than a poor discarded scrap of paper on which, perhaps, a dear good child at school has written his first clumsy letters.”³⁷¹ Walser, explaining here the importance of walking to a tax collector (who also walks because of his job...), writes a poetics of the walking writer, and affirms the importance of getting close to the smallest and most insignificant things, whilst forgetting yourself, your worries, your anxieties. “The highest and the lowest, the most serious and the most hilarious things are to him equally beloved, beautiful and valuable. He must bring with him no sort of sentimentally sensitive self-love or quickness to take offence. Unselfish and unegoistic he must let his careful eye wander and stroll where it will; only he must be continuously able in the contemplation and observation of things to efface himself, and to put behind him, little consider, and forget like a brave, zealous and joyful self-immolating front-line soldier, himself, his private complaints, needs, wants, and sacrifices.”³⁷² Walser comes close to giving instructions here on how to walk, but he is

³⁷¹ Walser, “The Walk”, op. cit., p 86.

³⁷² *Ibid.*

actually just playing the part of the one who gives instructions, because what he instructs is not to follow instructions, parameters, judgement's criteria, and to undo the "instructions" implicit within our subjectivity.

Walser compares the walking writer to a brave and determined soldier, immolating himself to the minutiae all around him. This writing machine is a war machine, but how seriously should we take this? "I assume that I can effect the reorganisation and regrouping of forces as well as any field marshal surveying all circumstances and drawing all contingencies and reverses into the net of his, it will be permitted me to say, genius for computation. [...] I have recently come to the conclusion that the art and direction of war is almost as difficult, and requires almost as much patience, as the art of writing, the converse being also true."³⁷³ Forgetting might trigger different affections, from a grief centered upon oneself, to an enthusiasm directed everywhere else. This enthusiasm is accompanied with the determination of the soldier, a determination of facing not the grand enemy, but "the most minute everyday experiences", or the grand enemy in its minute everyday forms. "He must at all times be capable of compassion, of sympathy, and of enthusiasm, and it is hoped that he is. He must be able to bow down and sink into the deepest and smallest everyday thing, and it is probable that he can. Faithful, devoted self-effacement and self-surrender among objects, and zealous love for all phenomena and things, make him happy in this..."³⁷⁴ And Walser continues, in a way that makes it difficult for me to carry on quoting him, because he starts to sound a bit too convinced of what he is saying. But perhaps he is not, as the text retains what is said in a state of ambiguity. "Perhaps there were a few repetitions here and there. But I would like to confess that I consider man and nature to be in lovely and charming flight from repetition, and I would like further to confess that I regard this phenomenon as a beauty and a blessing."³⁷⁵

7 Robert/Jakob and the institution

"Be welcome, left and abandoned intention! And you, effort that I have left in the lurch, how do you move me! And now? Will there be possibly a conversation?"³⁷⁶

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, p 68.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p 86.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p 102.

³⁷⁶ This is the ending paragraph of Walser, *Diario del 1926*, Il Melangolo, 2000, p 115. This text is not translated into English.

Finally comes *Jakob von Gunten*, Walser's "pedagogical" novel, set in a school, the Institute Benjamenta. The protagonist, Jakob / Robert, is a student, who, as is the case for everybody else in the institute, learns to become a perfect servant. The teachers of the school are asleep, or they pretend to be so, they do not teach anything. The school is run by the headmaster and his sister Lisa. Lisa makes the students perform the repetitive exercises that form their training. In the school there are rules and restrictions, they are important and yet empty, devoid of significance. The best students in the school are Kraus and Jakob. Kraus is already a perfect servant, he is a no one, a perfect zero: this is what is needed to be a perfect servant. Jakob is almost perfect, he is also a no one, a zero, but an *almost* perfect zero. Jakob is von Gunten, von unten, from below, from the lower, he comes from a declined aristocratic family whose name indicates the low, the bottom. Jakob seems a naive boy, but he is also a figure of violence: everything can be written on the surface of this cipher, Jakob re-enacts this writing, and the inscriptions become destructive.

"Herr Benjamenta is so prone to excitement and frailty, so very prone, that it almost makes me laugh, perhaps even grin. I think that everything, everything is frail, everything must needs tremble like worms. Yes, of course, and this illumination, this certainty, makes me a Croesus, that's to say, it makes me a Kraus. Kraus loves or hates nothing, therefore he is a Croesus, something in him verges on the inviolable. He's like a rock, and life, the stormy wave, breaks against his virtues."³⁷⁷

The Institute Benjamenta could be read as The Institution, the institution of society, where everybody is trained to serve. Roberto Calasso in his essay on Jacob von Gunten says: "The first, and least important, reasons that convince young Jakob von Gunten to the deep meaning of the teaching imparted by the Institute relate to society, the last descendant of a decayed aristocratic family, Jakob already has an inkling that in a world where everyone claims to be free and everyone is a slave (are not even those who seems the most free actually 'slaves, governed by a maddening, gross, scourging idea of the world?'), uniform obedience restores that ultimate asymmetry that is the indispensable

³⁷⁷ Walser, *Institute Benjamenta*, Serpent's Tail, 1995, p 117. The book is also published with the original title: Walser, *Jakob von Gunten*, New York Review of Books, 1999.

sign of sovereignty.”³⁷⁸ A century has passed from when this Institute Benjamenta was written, but we can still read in it, perhaps even more today, some of the mechanisms that order subjectivity and society. “What we do ourselves [pupils], we do it because we have to do it; but no one knows the precise reason why we have to do it. We obey without knowing what, one day, will be the result of this heedless obedience, and we grind away without thinking if all the work we carry out is fair or licit.”³⁷⁹ What the Institute sets in motion is an educational process of de-subjectivation, where you learn to undergo something like a dispossession of yourself. But this de-subjectivation is something different or more specific than a dispossession: we have to *actively* become servants. And this pedagogical institution is more based on control than discipline, the rules are few and pro forma, but the students are asked to be active in their becoming zero, as is the case of us today: we almost do everything by ourselves, through our considerable “freedom” capitalism penetrates our bodies, and there is no need for the brothers Benjamenta or the teachers to educate us (to capitalism). “They’re all alike in their rapid kindness, which just comes and goes, and I think this is because for the fear these people feel. They deal with persons and objects, one after the other, only so that they can cope again with some new thing that also seems to be demanding attention.”³⁸⁰

Jakob doubles Krauss, he doubles the perfect student, he is almost doing as well as Krauss does. Jakob is fascinated by the zero that Krauss is, the model of the perfect citizen. Jakob imitates Krauss, but in this performing again something errs. Jakob does not really believe in what he is supposed to be or become, he cannot believe in it, because he is, in a way, even less than a zero, he doesn’t have the linear and stable shape of a null point. He cannot take his career, his role, himself, or anything else, very seriously, as Krauss, for instance, does. You want me to be a zero? Great, but to become a zero is not necessarily to be contained within a role and an identity, and to serve can become something else than being a servant. There are different ways to de-subjectify, and Jakob’s way goes beyond perfection, towards the ineptness of a good-for-nothing. Krauss is perfectly de-subjectivized in the sense that he can function perfectly as part of the capitalist machinery. Jakob’s desubjectivation goes further, it starts flying away everywhere, without leaving its place intact. Jakob stays in the institute until the very end, until it collapses. In a way he is faithful to the institute, and this is what makes him

³⁷⁸ Roberto Calasso, “The Sleep of the Calligrapher” in *The Forty-Nine Steps*, Pimlico, 2002, pp 39-40.

³⁷⁹ Walser, *Institute Benjamenta*, *op. cit.*, p 29.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p 95.

dangerous. He does not build another institution, somewhere else, and on different basis, he stays where he is, and carries on acting, fighting his amorous skirmishes with Lisa, her brother, Kraus and the other students. Robert / Jakob incites us to stay where we are and to carry on performing, as if we are servants, until the institute collapses. We cannot think just in terms of people, we need to take institutions into account, as is the case here, people and institutions are intertwined, but not necessarily forever. Robert / Walser incite us to viscerally engage with our institutions, to play their games to unintended consequences.

Walser / Jacob von Gunten learns to become a servant. He is a student, and the topic he learns is peculiar: “how to become a servant”. Walser the student, instead of opposing the forces of subjection that make him a student and a servant, follows these forces and performs his subjected role/self in such a way that not only his role, but also that of the schoolmaster, and the institution itself, falls apart. In the distortion of this mirroring, of Jacob repeating what he is supposed to perform, other figures reverberate, perhaps that of Georges Bataille, for whom the sovereign becomes sovereign in such a ridiculous way that he collapses into a glorious abjection (here as well there is a repetition, a distorted mirroring). In his own way Guy Debord creates a stage for itself and his own “glorification”, using the abandoned debris of the spectacle.

In a way Jakob is an impostor. He pretends to be a servant of the institution, but in fact he provokes the collapse of the whole Institute. It is “as if” Jakob is a servant. He is not really pretending, but just performing, this is part of a theatrical game, the theatre of the Institute, where everybody learns how to serve through minute gestures, through a performance that makes serving almost imperceptible. The servant is a typical theatrical character in the *commedia dell’arte*. The Institute Benjamenta can be seen as a school for theatrical rehearsal, where students act out a pantomime, presenting every possible gesture of servitude. The perfect servant is the one who is not perceived as such, you do not even realize that he is serving. We could try to read a complex strategy behind Jakob’s performance, but even strategies, intentions and agencies are undone by an irresponsibility, a carelessness, a disinterest, or conversely an all too enthusiastic interest that one can never ascertain the veracity of. Jakob is “beside himself”, he is beside himself with rage, joy, glee, with curiosity... I cannot contain myself. This is how the “perfect” pupil becomes catastrophic.

Lisa and her brother are the masters of the institute, the institutional power relations are determined by their positions in the institution. Jakob manages to upset (*mandare all'aria*, that is, throw into the air, into air) these power relations. Throwing them into the air, is thus not a usurpation of power: Jakob is not interested in taking power for himself, he is a zero, he does not care (here Agamben's "whatever" singularity gains a different sense: whatever...). Jakob has a strange way of relating to Lisa and her brother, it looks as if he is playing a game with them, a power game, a love game, or even a duel: they seem to fall into this game without realizing. They both fall in love with Jakob. In a way Jakob loves them as well, but somehow it is not quite love. All this is more than a game, it is like theatre, fiction and reality, in all its frightfulness. Even when Jakob "loves", he is inept, a zero as a lover as well, his "love" ends up everywhere. This is why mistress Benjamenta gets sick and dies, she cannot be sustained by Jakob's love, she cannot possess him. The Institute collapses, and Jakob leaves together with the headmaster, who has ceased to be a headmaster, since there is no institute anymore. They leave for the desert. "I want to see if even in an uncultivated land it is possible to live, breathe, exist, to wish and sincerely do some good, and sleep at night and dream."³⁸¹

In Jakob von Gunten the Institute Benjamenta coincides with the institution of society, we learn how to become servants, subjected to something that we cannot know, condemned to engage in activities without any sense, subjected to the Institute itself. When the Institute collapses, Jakob leaves together with the schoolmaster, they will cross the desert to reach exotic and far away countries. Jakob / Robert carries on walking around the streets, across villages, along lakes, looking at people, crossing their paths, talking with them, with animals, clouds, meadows.

"Now you are not my pupil anymore Jakob. I don't want to educate and teach anymore, I want to live, and whilst living, I want to move, bring, do something."³⁸²

"I would even like to advise you to be a little torpid, forgetful, lazy-minded. For you see, what people call the vices play such a large role in human life, they're important, I might even say they are necessary. If there were no vices and failings, there be a shortage of warmth, charm, and richness in the world. Half of the world, and perhaps it

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p 136.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, pp 132-133.

is at root the better half, would perish along with the indolence and the weaknesses. No, be lazy. Well, well, now, don't misunderstand me, be just as you are, just as you have come to be, but please play at being a little remiss. Will you do it? Yes? It would please me to see you given to dreaming a little."³⁸³

There is a pedagogy of the institute which is based on repetition, on rehearsing, repeating empty gestures, a gymnastic that doesn't aim at anything. There is a pedagogy of Jakob, that twists this repeating, rehearsing and performing with a disengagement that becomes a mode of self-abandonment, freeing him from the requirement of being a perfect zero, a perfect tutor, a perfect student. Pedagogy of disengagement: Jakob's disengagement is everything but a flying away, Jakob stays in the Institute until the very end, and even after, he stays with Herr Benjamenta. Jakob engages with everything and everyone very intensely, but always in a somewhat disconnected way, confounding any interpretation of his actions and intentions. A pedagogy of forgetfulness, of irresponsibility, which, through indiscernible gestures, upsets the power dynamics that the institution otherwise prepares us for.

"For I don't respect my ego at all, I merely see it, and it leaves me cold. Oh, to come in from the cold! How glorious! I shall be able to come into the warmth, over and over again, for nothing personal or selfish will ever stop me from becoming warm and catching fire and taking part."³⁸⁴

"Ah, all these thoughts, all these peculiar yearnings, this seeking, this stretching out of hands toward a meaning. Let it all dream, let it all sleep. I'll simply let it come. Let it come."³⁸⁵

In "The Sleep of the Calligrapher" Roberto Calasso takes *Jacob von Gunten* as a variation of the story of *The Seven Sleepers*, intertwining it, through an anachronistic operation that Calasso relates to Aby Warburg, with myths on sleepiness and suspension of time.³⁸⁶ This is also an essay on Walser, and it is amazing how, at the same time, it is an essay "through" Walser, it writes Walser again but otherwise than Walser, writing

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, p 106.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p 120.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p 118.

³⁸⁶ Calasso refers to the myth of Chronos who sleeps in a golden cave, superintending the whole creation immersed in his slumber. Roberto Calasso, "The Sleep of the Calligrapher", p 42

something else. “All these comparisons may seem irreverent – and with good reason. Probably no one would be more surprised than Walser to see gods and celestial bodies circulating in *Jakob von Gunten*: He used a great many words, but it would be hard to find a “mythology” among them. And so? Writing has a life of its own unknown to its author; this, at least, was something about which Walser was never in any doubt. Few authors have been so secure in the self-sufficiency of their writing, and today, many others are ready to take it on faith, as a new dispensation. Yet this is not enough; there must be a double leap. It is a question not simply of writing but of the independent life of images.”³⁸⁷ And Calasso’s reference is here to Warburg and his idea of an autonomous life of images throughout times, a life that upsets the chronological time of history.

To read this essay by Calasso is a way of twisting Jakob von Gunten again, letting it twist us once more, in a sort of repetition: “it is not surprising that many have seen in the Benjamenta Institute an image of oppression, one among many representation of a wicked society.”³⁸⁸ Later on, Calasso, comparing Walser and Kafka, adds: “We will never be able to decide whether the Castle is a place of grace or hell or whether the Benjamenta Institute is an image of oppression or the liberated life.”³⁸⁹ The Institute Benjamenta should be taken in its singularity, not as the incarnation of the “bad” institution. Capitalism, despite itself, might offer us unforeseen possibilities for change, or forces which, if followed in certain way, may lead to the collapse of capitalism itself. “Specific knowledge is not imparted. At first young Jakob thinks of the place as a scam. But he will immediately change, forever. His loyalty to the Institute and his distance from every other form of life will keep growing.”³⁹⁰ What the Institute teaches its students is to free them from their consciousness, and from the thought that constitutes them as individuals aware of themselves. “Instead of forming a personality, as they say in pedagogic jargon, the Institute breaks it down and dissociates it. Here the obstacle the pupils must overcome is consciousness itself. They therefore train themselves in empty repetition and mimetic obedience: They follow any external order to rid themselves of the compulsion to think. They tend to reduce themselves to zero.”³⁹¹ We could read the Robber as Jakob after he left Master Benjamenta: “The Robber, you see, has too

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p 45.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p 47.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p 49.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p 37.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p 39.

delicate a constitution to harbour a large conscience, he has only a lightweight, tiny model, he hardly even feels it, and because it's such a pliant little slip of conscience, it never torments him at all, which of course thoroughly delights him."³⁹² Jakob von Gunten is not only the anti-hero that makes the institution collapse. He also learns from the Institute, learns to become a zero, and on account of this he would never return to a now lost form of life. The headmaster is not, or not only, representing the sovereign, the figure of power that Jakob destroys, he is also Jakob's teacher.

Calasso talks of a pedagogy of the Institute, Jakob finds himself in the institute and learns. This is only a preliminary learning: "The pupils are preparing themselves not to enter the world, but to leave it, unseen. [...] Every gesture is deprived of its function, everything becomes exercise, meaning is eroded, automatism is regained, and the symbolic function is sabotaged."³⁹³ But to exit the world can only be read as a different engagement with the world: the "automatism" of the schizo, its erosion of sense, its sabotaging of the symbolic function.

"Abandonment", "non-will", "abjection": these are terms that Calasso uses in the context of Walser's work. Walser as abject, the proponent of a pedagogy of abjection? Calasso reads Walser's desire as a form of "abjection", as "the disturbing pleasure of linking up with what is given, whatever it may be [...] the process begins by debasing anything that might recall an ego's choice."³⁹⁴ The desubjectivation Calasso reads in Walser implies a servitude that is "non will", a refusal of will as a "conjunction with the given". Calasso reads this "abjection" as Walser's "destructive blow", a blow that is often difficult to detect. I could take this "abjection" of Walser but only as in an "abject failure", a failure that is absolute, an inability to do anything other than fail. Oops, I didn't want to, what a disaster, once more... The "conjunction with the given" is not an acceptance of the given, it is not the "for" opposed to the "against", it is a starting from the middle, from what is available to us, it is a (micro) folding and twisting this middle. The "non will" is desire, the desire of the schizo, engaging with everything given, and not as the consequence of a motivation. It is an eroticism which, to some extent, is always disastrous.

³⁹² Walser, *The Robber*, op. cit., p 101.

³⁹³ Calasso, "The Sleep of the Calligrapher", op. cit., p 40.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 49.

Walser offers an inconsiderate pedagogy, the pedagogy of an inconsiderate “sleepiness”. “All are engulf in a common unconscious state, an abnormal kind of sleep, the absence that Jakob notes in his teachers and in Benjamenta himself. And Benjamenta tells him, ‘Jakob you are a little surprised, aren’t you at the lazy way we spend our lives here at the Institute, almost as though we were absent in spirit?’ In the face of such scandalous behavior, Jakob thinks briefly of rebelling; but nothing comes of it, and later he will understand that this kind of sleep is the supreme result of the curriculum.”³⁹⁵ Sleepiness is what the tutors teach and the students learn, a way of freeing the self from itself: I learn to free myself from my self-centered mind and my self-centered affections. Still, there is a difference between Kraus and Jakob’s sleepiness, this is something Calasso does not consider: today’s sleepiness, absence of spirit, gets doubled with Jakob. Sleepiness is a becoming unfocused: an inability to focus becomes an aptitude to perceive something else, something lateral, not clearly visible, audible or intelligible. The torpor of an awakening allows improbable conjunctions, a writing of confusion. Sleepiness can be a doubling of my sleepy self, falling asleep in front of the computer, not being able to sleep because of all the things going on in my head. Sleepiness becomes the doubling of an Attention Deficiency Disorder, from a pathology affecting the subject, to a capacity of sensing and perceiving what emerges beside and all around a defined and intelligible object of perception. A pedagogy of sleepiness, an activism of sleepiness, a conversation across balconies (did I hear that?).

Sleepiness, for Calasso, is a suspension of time, of chronological time, Walser finds himself in the middle of a cosmographic mythology. There is something violent in this sleepiness. Chronos eats his sons to prevent anything changing. Agamben as well writes of a time differing from chronology, but with Jakob we have a catastrophic sleepiness far away from Agamben’s messianic suspension: sleepiness as acting clumsily, as (for Calasso) an implosion of time. Walser talks to us, as if he was asleep in a cave for a hundred years, and wakes up today, after a century: chronological time implodes.

This sleepiness is erotic, as the skirmish Jakob fights with the master, as when his torpid body is lazily stretching in bed. If it is sleepiness this is a restless sleepiness, something

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p 39.

in me gets drowsy, and something takes place, “erotic” encounters, as when Buster Keaton meets the wind of a cyclone.³⁹⁶

If it is sleepiness it is the sleepiness of a sabotage, my shoe falls into a machine, just because I got distracted, dazed by the rhythm of the machine itself, attracted and distracted by it. Oops, it happened again...

Debord, Bataille, Walser offer different modalities of activism, of militancy. They offer different styles, style as a characteristic mode of action or manner of acting, as a way of performing. A style is a weapon, a stylus, a stiletto, a pointed tool to write, to inscribe a line on a surface. It is a tool of militancy, and it cannot be clearly described in itself, because this tool cannot be separated from the acting, a series of gestures, scratching, folding. A style is never personal, it is never proper to or the property of someone, Debord, Bataille, Walser. A style is not something that can be imitated, it is something that you can take up again, much like those improper weapons that the fugitive picks up and inserts hastily under the belt (small enough to be put under a belt).

Walser puts everything in danger, as Jakob and the Robber do: inside and outside the Institute, whatever he does has disaster at its horizon. With Jakob there is perhaps more a climax and a turning point, the collapse of the Institute. This collapse is a turning point for Walser himself, it indicates that, after the collapse of the Institute, there can be collapse everywhere, even where this does not appear. We have here at last with Jakob, at the end of the chapter, what is already in the middle, the possibility of a collapse. A lady to the Robber:

“Apparently you like to bathe in the bath of politeness, but might be this agreeable pastime not bring you inner rifts? With me as well you were ingeniously friendly right from the start, which make one suspect you of lacking, perhaps, the strength of soul to resist the urge to stroke, as it were, other people. And as for the children of pretty, elegantly clothed mothers who, although they’re Frenchwomen, have blue eyes – you wait on them like a servant. Might you be losing yourself when you do this, squandering yourself? No one knows who you really are. Do you yourself still not know what you want in life, your *raison d’être*? And then it angers many that you yourself never show anger, or only in far too fugitive a way. How is it you can manage to endure yourself?

³⁹⁶ Buster Keaton, *Steamboat Bill Jr.*, 1928.

Are you no more and no less than human? Isn't it time you become more intelligible? Your person lacks a label, your way of living shows no particular stamp. When I saw you swoop to the side of that small and no doubt touchingly irrelevant child, I felt terribly embarrassed, for, you see, I was quite simply ashamed for you, on account of this thoughtless happiness, the so utterly unassuming pleasure you took in your preposterous servility."³⁹⁷



APPENDIX 13: Al contadin non far sapere



APPENDIX 14: Beauty, Anger, Joy (al padron non far sapere)

³⁹⁷ Walser, *The Robber*, op. cit., pp. 71-72.

Conclusions

The thesis analyses de-subjectivation as a key process in Agamben's "bare life" understood as the dominant form of life of the contemporary. By shifting the focus from Agamben to Debord, Bataille and Walser, authors the Italian philosopher uses to develop his politics of bareness, the thesis argues for a centrality of de-subjectivation in the context of a micropolitics as defined by Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari. Through a close reading of Debord, Bataille, Walser and their practices of de-subjectivation as artistic, the thesis moves away from Agamben's politics of potentiality: de-subjectivation becomes politically emancipatory not when suspended in a polarity with its opposite but when it generates a consistency allowing for multiple forms of life to emerge; not when it is confined to a hermeneutic practice but when it becomes an artistic practice in a broad sense of the term; not when it is reduced to a human condition but when it also engages with something other than people.

The thesis shows de-subjectivation becoming political when it produces shifts from the individual self to a plurality, from the individualized subject needed by capitalism - flexible but nonetheless individualized - to a plurality that can be more than a plurality of people. De-subjectivation becomes political when it opens up connections between the micro and the macro, between a transformation and emancipation of subjectivity and that of institutions and forms of organization. De-subjectivation becomes political when through its process a shift from theory to something like a theory-practice takes place, where thinking is not separated from acting, moving, organizing. De-subjectivation becomes political when it allows for an actualization of the past to take place, for a temporal and spatial re-composition of what is distant in time and space, for possibilities of encounters between the here and now and experiences of militant practices coming from somewhere else.

Agamben usefully reads constructed situations as an artistic and political practice to counter the alienation of the spectacle not with an opposition but through operations that undo the subject otherwise. These suggestions are further developed in the thesis away from Agamben's simplifying apparatus of potentiality, and also in relation with Bataille and Walser. Agamben dismisses Bataille's radical practices of de-subjectivation as ridiculous and politically ineffective in order to defend the balance of a potentiality that

Bataille threatens to put out of proportion – the thesis takes up the challenge to engage with Bataille’s perilous method. Agamben places Walser as the hidden core of his politics of a “coming community”, a universal human community beyond good and evil, action and passivity, creation and destruction. Walser is read here not as ontologically foundational but as constantly re-questioning relationships, producing an ecology of engagement where the human loses its centrality.

In the first chapter of the thesis, constructed situation, *derive* and *detournement* are analysed as artistic practices involving an alteration of subjectivity. To construct situations is a practice which de-subjectivizes otherwise, against a capitalist de-subjectivation of alienation and estrangement, but not in opposition to it. *Derive* is a “constructed” drifting around the streets of a city, not only to experience the city differently but also to gradually produce a different city and a different subjectivity - different from the city and subjectivity the spectacle produces - through a manipulation of habits and of encounters between ourselves and the city. Similarly, *detournement* is not just an artistic technique to subvert the meaning of books, films, adverts, it is also a practice through which we can question and “divert” our selves, against a spectacular subjectivation – as Debord shows particularly in his last film. The spectacle functions on the basis of a compulsion to appear, it is capitalism exploiting our desire for appearance; in this sense capitalism as spectacle is today more powerful than it was when Debord was writing his *Society of the Spectacle*: *derive* and *detournement* can be useful tools to struggle against a spectacular subjectivation that forces us to appear, to promote ourselves, to create shiny identities that can rapidly circulate, often immaterially, in order to be flexibly put at work. *Derive* and *detournement* are techniques that allow us to appear otherwise, and still to appear, to expose ourselves in ways that challenge capitalism in the form of the spectacle.

Through Agamben’s reading of Debord the chapter deals with two other aspects in relation to constructed situations: the temporality it produces and its theatricality. Nietzsche’s eternal return is read by Agamben as a constructed situation, and as a theatrical form. This reading opens up the possibility to think *derive* and *detournement* as producing not only spatial but also temporal drifts and diversions. This “de-subjectivation” of time and of a capitalist temporality is exemplified through the thesis by the contamination Debord, Bataille and Walser can produce for the present. To drift and divert time does not mean to abolish history and do away with a sense of the

contemporary and its analysis, but to allow for different and sometimes improbable encounters to happen between us in the present and what comes from the past, between a contemporary subjectivation and forms of struggle coming from different historical contexts.

Theatricality is an aspect of subjectivation we encounter throughout the dissertation, in relation to Debord and the spectacle, but also to Bataille and Walser. To think subjectivation as theatrical is a way to emphasize its artificiality, its artistic character, our possibility of intervening in its process. Theatricality is also a feature of the spectacle, of the becoming image of life: to distinguish between “reality” and “fiction” becomes increasingly difficult, to the extent that the opposition between those categories can be considered obsolete. This opposition gets questioned inasmuch as art is not something separated from life, as Debord, Bataille and Walser show us. When art is not separated from life it is not separated from politics, it produces political effects. The theatre of Dario Fo, which brings affective drifts and diversions of the body together with current urgencies shared and discussed with the public, and that of Augusto Boal, with its “rehearsals for change” addressing forms of oppression and exploitation, are examples that accompany the passage from theatre to a theatricality of life with a potential of emancipation.

In the second chapter, Bataille’s first collective then individual experiments with violence and death are analysed as tools to struggle against bourgeois and fascist subjectivation. In comparison with Debord, these experiments are more difficult to define. Often they are everyday kind of experiments, like getting drunk, having sex, meditate. The difference with everyday practices is that Bataille’s are exercises as experiments to destroy capitalism and the bourgeoisie, the dominant social class. Bataille contrasts the need and ability of capitalism to make profit, to accumulate, to capitalize on everything, with a destructive kind of expenditure, with a destruction of ends. I get drunk not just to get pleasure out of it, I have sex not as a productive or reproductive activity, I meditate in the morning not to feel better and work better during the day. I get drunk, read a book and discuss it with my friends in a way that destroys the teleological machinery capturing those activities and imbuing subjectivity. And at the same time I find ways not to die or go insane in the experiment. There are no prescribable or describable techniques here, there is an attempt to confront yourself with

death, to unleash a violence that capitalism and the bourgeoisie tend to cover up whilst exploiting, and fascism capitalizes upon taking it to the very end of actual death.

If it is more difficult today to define and identify a “bourgeoisie” as a dominant class, it is still clear that violence is a monopoly of the state, often at the service of individuals, castes and corporations. For neoliberalism it is important to cover this violence or transcend it into spectacle – here we can read a continuity with the bourgeois need to cover violence Bataille was fighting against. Bataille today can help us rethinking violence, not as ending up in death, not necessarily as violence against human beings, but as violence against the dominant system and its teleology. To get drunk, to meditate, to read a book can become experiences to unleash forces that destroy capitalism in and outside ourselves. The very violence capitalism produces, the violence of war for example, has to be turned against capitalism itself, against its principles, against its power of reproducing its own life from death and devastation. In this perspective, even the most peaceful activity like growing a communal garden can become a violent practice of organizing against capitalism: it is important for the gardeners to “KNOW IT”, as Bataille says. Bataille would probably be horrified by reading this example, which certainly makes violence to Bataille. Let’s put some of our anger and poison into the growing of this monstrous garden.

The third chapter analyses Walser’s modalities of de-subjectivation. Walser differs from Debord and Bataille inasmuch as he is not a theorist, he is a novelist who keeps writing himself as part of his stories. A process of subjectivation is put in motion through writing. Walser the man cannot be distinguished from Walser the writer, from Walser restaging himself under different names and characters. This impossibility of distinguishing Walser from his many other Walsers opens up the possibility of looking at a process of subjectivation that is a continuous experiment, a lifelong experiment open to all sorts of everyday encounters and to all the details of prosaic thoughts and behaviours occurring every day. Still, all this banality is art, it is constructed. What we learn from Walser is to relate differently with other people, things, animals, landscapes. In his practice the devices are also difficult to name and define, but his writings can be taken as de-subjectivizing machines whose functioning can be analyzed and described. Walser becomes a robber who idles all the time (ruination of work), a poet who gets overwhelmed by a beautiful landscape and stops writing (ruination of productivity), he becomes a series of characters that challenge their destiny by repeating their actions

again and again and missing their plot (ruination of the irreversibility and immutability of things and history), a walker who entertains the most fervent exchange with everything he encounters (ruination of enclosures and private property), a student who by getting too passionate about the institution he studies and lives in, ends up destroying it (ruination of institutional hierarchies).

What emerges in all those instances is an indiscriminate, intense and at the same time light-hearted engagement that produces a constant renegotiation of power relations, and the possibility of a ruination of the dominant system through a sort of (perhaps) disingenuous over-identification with it. With his enthusiasm and his passion for serving, for becoming small, for being nothing, Walser ends up undoing hierarchies and inequalities. Instead of trying to take power or fighting against a dominant power, you undo power relationships by investing them with an intensity and a passion that do not follow a logic of separations, order and scale between different subjects. This is a radicalized condition of precarity, where power relations are constantly renegotiated on a micro scale. What does it take to put this into practice? Something like a collective sort of madness, a becoming schizo that would constantly produce a shift from an individual and psychologised perspective to a multiple one, to the ecology of a constant renegotiation amongst everything – and this not without conflicts and the sense of closeness to a (micro) catastrophe. How do we learn to learn from Walser? To think a pedagogy in those terms, and towards a schizoanalysis, would be to continuously renegotiate affectively the power relationships between learning subjects, the relationships with the institutions, and with the knowledge produced.

Debord, Bataille and Walser offer us artistic tools for an activism that takes subjectivity as a site for struggle. Art is here intended not as a professionalized and institutionalized practice, but as an ability to create devices that can have an impact onto subjectivity, that can produce affects. Politics is here intended also as a micropolitics, a politics of emancipation from dominant forms of subjectivation and from the dominant system producing them, a politics of experimentation with different subjectivities, different institutions, different forms of life.

Appendixes

NOTE

This section is comprised of case studies, personal accounts and experiences that together form a corpus of texts differing in tone from the main thesis itself, more personal in nature than the discursive, objective form of the latter. If this overall structure could ostensibly be seen as instantiating a division between theory and practice, in fact the connection between case studies and the trajectory of the argument is always intimate; at each point the latter is in effect shaped by the former. To compensate for this artificial but structurally necessary division I have chosen to mark the distinction between the two orders of the text with the following sign:



APPENDIX 1: Three cases of theatre everywhere

1. Theatrical experiences: from Relational Aesthetics to a Nike store

“Today the training of the worker and the soldier implies a maximum integration in the processes of semiotization. The children in front of the television ‘work’; they ‘work’ at the nursery with playing techniques conceived to enhance their perceptive performances.”³⁹⁸

“One now needs a deterritorialized worker, someone who does not freeze into professional experience, but who follows the progress of technology, indeed, who develops a certain creativity, a certain participation.”³⁹⁹

The spectacle today seems to expand far beyond the territory of the visual in its strict sense of a realm of commodities and images. Today life becomes spectacle through the organization of experiences rather than simply through a circulation of semiotic impulses. “Experience economy” is the term used to define an economy that is based not so much on goods and services, but on the construction of “theatrical stages”, an

³⁹⁸ Guattari, “Gli asili nido e l’iniziazione” in *La rivoluzione molecolare*, p 105. My translation (this text is not in the English edition of *Molecular Revolution*).

³⁹⁹ Guattari, “Cinema of Desire”, in *Chaosology*, Semiotext(e) 2009, p 237.

economy that offers to costumers not just entertainment as something “passively absorbed through the senses”, but “active engagement”. “Experiences are events that engage individuals in a personal way”, explain Paine and Gilmore in *The Experience Economy : Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage*, and “while the work of the experience stager perishes, the value of the experience lingers”.⁴⁰⁰ It is impressive to see how a book like this shares a similar terminology and analogous ideas with today’s critical debate around contemporary art, and its call for a participation of the public.

A reading of the spectacle as theatrical, or better a counter-reading, since a reading of it is already provided by books like the one just mentioned, would be more than useful. Apple, or Nike, for example, do not simply shape lifestyles through a circulation of images: they construct experiences, they construct situations. The shop becomes an Apple-World, where what is on offer is much more than just the products to buy, where the consumer (but this term becomes reductive now), is invited to participate in a Nike-World, to act on the Apple-stage.

At stake there is something more than a mere quantitative measure, an increase of sales and profits: Tate Modern offers a similar Tate-Experience, but the aim is clearly not just to sell more sandwiches, coffee and catalogues to its public. There is a desperate call from Tate (there has been for some time) to expand its public, to increase participation, to widen access. The call is so desperate that it goes beyond the necessity of registering an ever increasing number of visitors in order to keep getting public and private funding. The Unilever commissions are perhaps the most spectacular tool of the becoming theatre of Tate Modern; we can think of the famous “*Sun*”, which made crowds of people stare at their reflected bodies rolling around the turbine hall for entire afternoons, or the equally famous “*Slides*” which provoked a sort of slide-hysteria.⁴⁰¹

What we have at stake here, in this “experiential economy”, is a manipulation of affects, an education of the participants based on the production of affections: bodies rolling on the floor, precipitating from different heights, smiles and grinning faces all over the museum...

⁴⁰⁰ B. Joseph Pine II, James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage*, Boston, Mass., Harvard Business School Press, 1999, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁰¹ As soon as I got, without asking it, a ticket for the Tate-slide from a girl who had just used it and who suggested I could try to use it again, the ticket was pulled up from my hand by a tourist with a haunted looking who run away with it: she probably had to leave London the next day and that was the only chance she had to experience the Tate-slide.

People need art, art has to be accessible, people need to participate, they need to be educated by Tate, and a complex organization, of which the Unilever commissions are just the most spectacular element, is taking care of this education.

Nietzsche talks about a manipulation of affects and affections in the third dissertation of the *Genealogy of Morals*, dedicated to the question “What do the ascetic ideals mean?” He shows the apparent paradox that makes the ascetic ideals function through an incitement of affects rather than a negation of them. The contemporary art curator would stand today for an equivalent of the priest manoeuvring the affective force of the masses. Beyond similarities, Nietzsche shows us how the incitement of affects and their manipulation is not exclusive to our time. Moreover, by reading Nietzsche’s text it is difficult to avoid thinking of, not only Tate Modern and Relational Aesthetics, but also other kinds of “arts” like cinema and TV, and the way they produce something like a channelled “exorbitance of feelings” that sometimes appears, at a first reading, to be in contrast with the sober and glossy style of the production of today’s officially recognized creative culture: “For them all it is a matter of just one thing: *an exorbitance of feeling*.”⁴⁰²

What has all this to do with activism and politics? Our political “battlefield” is a field of affects, it is traversed by them. Politics, even when intended as macropolitics, seems to be based less (and less) on communication, on language as communication of meaning, and more on language as gestures, to use a term that comes from Agamben. Affections like fear and panic, or desperation, seem to drive people today more than ideological convictions. Affects need to be channelled and made politically productive, and Tate contributes to such an affective productivity.

Today and before, what has been called ideology has always had to do with affects, and affective communication cannot be separated from meaningful communication. It’s not necessary to oppose affects to meanings, and it is not necessary to characterize today’s politics as affective, and yesterday’s as ideological. The first advantage in dealing with an affective battlefield is that we can do without the idea of an affective politics as an aim to reach, as opposed to a politics of communication: affects are not something “good” in themselves, and politics is always already affective anyway. Long ago Foucault started his analysis of power relations produced through affects, bodily forces,

⁴⁰² Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, New York, Vintage Books, 1969, p. 273.

a discipline of the body, the control and individuation of the subject acting on the stage of different institutions. What is important here for us is the “how” of this acting, the possible uses, or counter-uses, of affects and affections, and the modality of a staging, more than the analysis of the structure of a stage.

When it comes to experience, a distinction has to be made between two kinds of experiences, the first is experience as something we are incited to have, as something we have to collect and accumulate. This is the Tate experience, the Nike experience, alongside so many others, it is an experience that despite its ephemeral appearance of entertainment, has to be calculable in some way, and has to serve a function for economy, or education. This is an experience that serves for us to grow, to get updated, to keep up with our times, it serves for us to function better, to work better. The other experience is created by us, collectively, an experience that is produced in the friction between contemporary times and some other time, between our selves and something else. It is also an experience that in itself is nothing “special”, “extraordinary”, “phenomenal”: it is a whatever experience that becomes “special” because of the way it impacts us when we come to deal with it.

From Nike to Tate Modern and back, the relational is always already in place. “Relational” is a too general term to define a particular type of art, a certain type of aesthetics. What Bourriaud calls “relational” is a specific kind of relationality, it is not just an art that needs the presence of a public to be activated, but, more distinctively, an art that creates an inert public that it then tasks itself with animating, offering platforms to this public for it to “socialize.” These are Bourriaud’s ideas in a nutshell; although he does not talk about the public as “inert”, this is the implicit condition that is presupposed for the relational platform to function.⁴⁰³

In this sense “relational art” often appears synonymous with a certain model of entertainment (let’s roll all together on the floor of Tate Modern, what an amusing way of socially occupying a space!). It organizes bodies, it orders affections, and it is enough to look at the smiles, or grins, stamped on the face of Tate’s visitors to understand this. An interactive stage for an entertained public, for a public that has to enjoy the art experience, this is the theatre of relational aesthetics, fostering a parody of action and

⁴⁰³ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon, Les presses du reel, 2002.

empowerment: I'm finally allowed to get close to art, to touch the work, to climb it, to press this button...!

At Tate as in a Nike store, art becomes a place for sociality, a preconceived stage for a pre-organized assembly. There is both the assumption of the inertia of a public, and the production of the public as inert, a public which has to occupy the stage of contemporary art to become active, it has to actively roll on the floor as well as actively buy Nike products. Debord and the Situationist International are an essential starting point for Bourriaud (as he says in *Relation Aesthetics*), but their ideas and practice are submitted to a kind of corporate transformation. For Debord "art" was not a field or territory (as it is for Bourriaud), it was not a specialized discipline with a specific mission: art was the construction of situations. For Bourriaud art is something conceived somewhere else by someone else, by a professionally recognized figure, and it is offered to something like a public.

But then, what is the difference between this model of "relational art" and all kind of art, since Lascaux? Art is always implying a relation with subjectivity, either individual or collective, it always has an impact on a process of subjectivation, not just "relational art" but also paintings and sculptures, art we were just told to look at, to stare: there is always much more than just an act of looking taking place, and much more than a one-to-one relation between a viewer and an artwork. Art is not relational today because it has become something surrounding us rather than something we have to stand in front of: from painting to installation and from installation to a platform / stage (in the form of a reproduction of the artist's kitchen where you can make yourself a "relational" cup of tea). There is always something like a "socialization", in the sense of a collective dimension of the experience of art. The difference is that with "relational art" this sociality is imposed to us, designed in advance, in the form of an art "platform". Bourriaud's model for its relational aesthetics ends up being closer to the Nike-Experience than to the experience of the Situationist International. Bourriaud starts from the SI and ends up near the corporate approach he imagined he opposed in the first place.

2. Art and non-art, *Folk Archive* as theatrical doubling

As in the previous case, Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane's *Folk Archive*, presented at the Barbican's Curve in 2005, emerges at the crossroads of art and certain non-artistic models. By displaying an archive of "folk" artefacts in a space consecrated to the exhibition of contemporary art, using the latest curatorial modalities of display, *Folk Archive* produced a tension between art that is recognized as such, and something like an "art" which does not care about its own recognition.

Deller and Kane filled the space of the Curve with photographs of cakes resembling handbags, painted nails, wreaths in the shape of a cigarette... As the two "archivists" explain in the preface of the catalogue, *Folk Archive* intends to update the field of "popular art" by including not only objects, but also videos, performances, documentations, installations, into an exhibition of art collected "from outside prescribed art arenas". The different categories organizing the field of contemporary art are here applied to "folk art".

We enter the Curve expecting to see contemporary art, and we get something which is not quite that, something upon which today's system for categorizing and displaying contemporary art has been superimposed. A sort of doubling of contemporary art seems to emerge, a repetition where it is impossible to establish what comes first, who is the impostor: we are somehow invited or allowed to compare a giant mechanical elephant, entertaining the kids of a town in Cumbria, with Carsten Holler's famous *Slides*, or any similar relational / entertaining artwork. Pizza Rut (!), a stall selling pizza in Brighton, becomes an installation, resembling impressively the kebab stall Thomas Hirshhorn conceived as part of the *Bataille Monument* at Documenta 11. A series of photographs of "Vegetable Animals" could easily be confused with a work by Fischli and Weiss...⁴⁰⁴

What is most striking in this artificial resemblance is the exposition of the relationality of the works, which always presuppose an active "public", an often "socializing" user, rather than a conventional viewer. If we look at the different sections of the exhibition, listed in the catalogue, "Performance" comes first and also last, again, as a "Reprise", whilst "Ephemeral" appears as another related entry. A broad idea of performance and an active subject expands well beyond these sections, throughout the documentation of

⁴⁰⁴ Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane, *Folk Archive*, London, Book Works, 2005.

fairs and festivals, towards videos and photographs of “happenings” and demonstrations (and where does the “art” reside here: in the banners and “props” used by demonstrators, or is the event itself a form of “performance art”?), but it also expands towards Pizza Rut, towards Snowdrop the mechanical elephant, to the extent that most of the objects and images on display could be seen as props, because they are objects to be “used” in different situations. The difference between a relational art platform ready to be used, and this “folk art” is that here there is nothing like a properly designed stage ready for us to use, but just objects, or props, as bits and pieces for us to perform a situation.

The exhibition, by overlaying art categories on what is not (formally recognised as) art, by gathering this folk art into an institutional art space, ends up undermining the distinction between art and folk art, between art and non art, between “art and life”. This non-art is not something like the expression of a creativity waiting to be recognised as such. The intention, or at least the effect, is not to broaden the field of contemporary art, to make its boundaries more inclusive. What we have here is not “art”, it is something that eludes its classification as “art”, and it eludes it because it is indifferent towards it, because there are no “authors” claiming an artistic authorship as part of the “contemporary art world”, because they do not bother, they do not care whether what they do is labelled as “art” or not.⁴⁰⁵

Deller and Kane impose specific constraints onto everyday objects and situations, and the effect is to potentiate the irreducibility of what they call “folk”, that is, something that does not bothered to recognize itself as “art”. This is *Folk Archive*’s “activism”, to create the condition for something everyday to unleash a force, to demonstrate its force in a “show of strength”, like in a “dressed rehearsal”: as though everything – nails, cakes, wreaths and puppets – had gathered there temporarily, ready to invade the streets once again, to pierce the spectacle once more.

Folk Archive is also useful here to define what the “art” of this thesis is and means. It is not necessarily art as what is recognized as such by art institutions or the “art world”. I don’t talk much about that kind of art here, the art that takes its place in the publications sold at the Barbican’s bookshop. Art is what carries with it the possibility of a

⁴⁰⁵ “The one aspect common to all contributions is that they have been authored by individuals who would perhaps not call themselves artists.” Deller and Kane, *Folk Archive, op. cit.*, p. 2.

transformation, of assemblages that can provoke a disruption of the established and the dominant: therefore art doesn't need to be recognised, labelled, categorized as such.

Something like a conversation across balconies, *Mujeres Creando*, myself talking with a friend, *Folk Archive* and *La ricotta*, are momentarily gathered, ready to run off. *Folk Archive* provides a model of theatricality as an ex-posing theatre, as a repetition before a performance, or an exposition of a theatre about to blow up, as a staging where the "every day", what populates the streets of London, is forced into a different space and into a system of categories in such a way that the performance is momentarily interrupted. There is a sense of something imminent going to happen in this theatre about to explode, in this model which is about to blow up as a model: the props, the objects, together with their possible use, are massed in a proliferation that is hardly disciplined by the overarching categories, and that, inadvertently, doubles the platforms of a homogeneously and professionally designed relational art.

3. *La ricotta* as theatrical activism

At the core of the short film *La ricotta* are the re-enactments Pasolini makes of two renowned paintings by the "Mannerist" artists Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino. As a preliminary connection between Pasolini and Agamben, it could be recalled that Pasolini and the young Agamben were friends, that Agamben took part in Pasolini's *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*, where he, as a non-professional actor, impersonated Philip the Apostle, in 1964, just one year after *La ricotta*, a film in which Pasolini uses non professional actors as well.

La ricotta is a film of the making of a film on the Passion of Christ, directed by a filmmaker impersonated by Orson Wells. Most of the film's actors are recruited from the Roman working class, as the Good Thief is, whose name is Stracci, which means "rags". Projecting the schema of a Marxist class division onto the film, it could be said that whilst most of the actors are workers, the middle class is present in the form of the mediocre journalist interviewing the filmmaker, with Wells/Pasolini taking the role of the intellectual ("Action! ...Action! he keeps shouting at Stracci, trying to shake that sort of passivity, the political carelessness of the working class picking up flowers); the

upper class, personified throughout the film by Laura Betti, the spoiled actress, invades the set at the end of the film with its ghostly glamour.

“Leave them nailed!”... “c’mon slaves”... “stay crucified!”... the working class is exploited for the benefits of the other two classes, but it is also revealed as being the core of the entire (cinematographic) production, with its uncontainable vitality, its exuberance, its basic appetites – sexual appetites (the strip-tease), physiological appetites (Stracci’s insatiable hunger). This exuberance, both earthly and celestial (a winged working class dressed as angels and saints, “blaspheme” in the eyes of the Italian censorship), beyond good and evil (the playful cruelty of Stracci’s mates), gets exploited, but at the same time it is irreducible to its exploitation, irreducible because impossible to contain.

The two scenes of the depositions of Pontormo and Rosso are re-enactments of paintings in which the working class acts behind the subject of the representation. The working class is exposed as the core of two masterpieces of Mannerism, a style considered as a sophisticated alteration of High Renaissance painting, in the direction of a theatrical artificiality (a theatrical artificiality which is very different, for instance, from that of Caravaggio, who similarly to Pasolini was in love with the “people”). In *La ricotta* there is something like a doubling of Rosso and Pontormo, their paintings get activated again, in a theatrical repetition.

Despite several attempts, the working class seems not to be able to re-enact the paintings. Numerous accidents prevent the completion of the shot: a pop song comes from a radio, a man sticks his finger up his nose, the Magdalene opens her arms too wide, an angel looks at another in a too intense way, the body of the Christ slips away from the arms of the Apostles, and laughter repeatedly shatters the tableau-vivant, too much *vivant* for a tableau. This is a ruining vitality, the falling body of a laughing Christ.

Working class, middle class, upper class... *La Ricotta* is a sort of commedia dell’arte, a representation of society categorized in different recognizable, and to some extent stereotyped, classes. It starts from the recognizable – the characters, the story of the Passion of Christ and its representation – only to disturb their recognisability through excessive gestures, movements, appetites.

What the theatrical double “reveals” is the force of the working class, irreducible because it is not aware of itself, because it seems not to care much, it is there playing an enforced role (imposed by society, or by its authors, Pontormo, Rosso, Pasolini) a role it will always exceed. At least until *Petrolio*, until the working class gradually disappears, descending the hell of its transformation into the Dantesque circles of consumerism.⁴⁰⁶

It is where humanity exits the bowels of earth to “see the stars again”, when the Marxist prophecy of a society without classes is completed, that Agamben places his coming community.

La ricotta enacts the theatre of society, presents the drama of the exploitation of the working class, and affirms the irreducibility of its force. In doing this it constitutes something like an elected political subject, something like a blessed political body. Antonio Negri’s “multitude” could be read as an attempt to upgrade the political subject of the working class by restructuring it around notions of migration and exile. The specificity of a political subject as somehow “blessed” is for Negri still in place, as it is the faith for its irreducible political force.⁴⁰⁷

Echoes of something like a “Catto-Marxism” (a combination of Marxism and Catholicism) could be perceived in Agamben as well, where the blessed subject of politics coincides not with a specific class but with the whole of humanity. Something like a subject of history seems to be still in place in Pasolini, Negri, Agamben.⁴⁰⁸

But at least Pasolini’s working class does not coincide with itself, with its own representation, and this non-coincidence appears beyond the author’s intentions. This is again the staging of a theatrical model that ex-poses itself, that does not coincide with, that exceeds itself. We have a cinematographic framework, a visual organization taken from an artwork, and a subject (the working class in *La ricotta* as the folk in *Folk Archive*) which together result in a series of everyday fractures and eruptions that

⁴⁰⁶ Pasolini, *Petrolio*, Einaudi, 1992.

⁴⁰⁷ See for instance Negri’s work together with Michael Hardt: Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2000; Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, London, Penguin, 2006; Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, Harvard University Press, 2011.

⁴⁰⁸ Through autonomy as an “attivo sottrarsi”, an active escape, as formulated by Franco Berardi this subject loses its essentialization: autonomy has less to do with the specific condition of a political subject, then with a “dis-interest”, with a disentanglement from the “interests” generated through the capital. Franco Berardi, *Dell’innocenza*, Verona, Ombre Corte, 1997, pp. 91-108, and *passim*.

compromise the coherence of the subject, of the representation, of the stage: gazes, laughter, a music coming from the radio, a falling body. Here theatricality becomes something that escapes from the performance of the “working class” (from the “folk” as the expression of the working class’ creativity). This is theatricality as a multiplied repetition, as a model that starts falling to pieces, where something begins to escape in all directions.

Pasolini, in the figure of his alter ego the filmmaker / intellectual, exposes himself as part of the exploitative machine staged by *La Ricotta*. Orson Wells explains to the journalist how the owner of his newspaper is also the producer of this film. Pasolini / Wells still makes his movie, he consciously acts as an agent of exploitation, and critiques this exploitation from within. But he also shows the revolutionary potential that exploitation cannot wipe out, the revolutionary potential that art can offer, this film, or the paintings by Rosso and Pontormo, who, not dissimilarly from Pasolini, had their patrons, and used “working class” people to create their work. For Pasolini this potential for revolution comes from the encounter between art and the working class, the peasants, the only people still moved by archaic forces (“sono una forza del passato...” reads Wells to the journalist). This “force coming from the past”, comes through the story of the passion, through Renaissance paintings, through a strong connection with the earth and earthly appetites, with a morality which is pagan before being Christian, with an eroticism that has nothing of the turbidity of the bourgeois one. And even if Pasolini soon will cease to see in the working class this revolutionary potential, the possibility for it to re-emerge is always there, in the capacity of the archaic unleashing again its forces, undermining the oppositions between kindness and cruelty, high and low, spiritual and terrestrial, upon which a Christianity perverted by capitalism exercises its power.⁴⁰⁹

APPENDIX 2: **Radio Alice**

I double love into passion, as love facing its own *whatever*, a conversation across balconies, not love for someone or something, but passion beyond subjects and objects,

⁴⁰⁹ In *Come le lucciole. Una politica della sopravvivenza*, Didi-Huberman reads Pasolini with Aby Warburg on the background, tracing the lights of the fireflies in Pasolini, and the possibility for their re-emergence even when all light seems to be gone and we find ourselves immerse into what seems a complete darkness. Didi-Huberman, *Come le lucciole*, Bollati Boringhieri, 2011.

passion as something that goes beyond the emergence of an object of enquiry. Radio Alice is presented here as a passionate staging, as the possible point of a significant encounter, where the enquiry is always exceeded in a repetition, in a coming back again.

I add this section to introduce a case where the experience of the Situationist International, the strategy of *détournement*, is practiced in a different context from their own. I talk of Radio Alice as a way to relate differently with the writing of Bifo, and to reconnect this relation to the encounter with “activism” I described in the introduction. But there is much more to Radio Alice.

I finally take the time to look for *Lavorare con lentezza*, a film on Radio Alice directed in 2004 by Guido Chiesa, its script written by the filmmaker together with Wu Ming, a collective of writers based in Bologna. The film was widely distributed in Italy, it was easy to rent even in Bolzano, where I suspected a film on Radio Alice would attract little audience. What is Radio Alice anyway? *Lavorare con lentezza* is a fictional translation of the events happened in Bologna in 1977 around Radio Alice.⁴¹⁰

“Do you remember Radio Alice dad?” No answer, he stares into the void, perhaps trying to remember. “Do you remember 77?”. He is not going to watch the film, he goes to sleep instead; my mother stays and watches. Towards the end of the film she says “Yes, I think I remember something now...”

I didn't like the film. It looks as if the protesters of March 77 were all involved in Radio Alice, as if the protests were organized by Radio Alice itself. Something very different comes out from the voices broadcasted by Radio Alice in those days, and from the phone calls received by the radio.⁴¹¹ At some point the participation in the riots became generalized, passers-by were joining the crowd. In one of the recorded phone calls someone is talking about an old man who suddenly appears at the head of cortege, leading the demonstration with the music of an accordion. I was waiting for the old man to appear in the film but, nothing, all you have are a group of young and good looking boys and girls, upset for the death of one of their comrades.

⁴¹⁰ *Lavorare con lentezza*, directed by Guido Chiesa, Fandango 2004.

⁴¹¹ The audio material is collected in a CD included in *Collettivo A/traverso* (Franco Berardi (Bifo) et al.), *Alice e' il diavolo*, Milano, Shake, 2007.

But there is an interesting documentary included in the DVD, where you can see some footage from the Seventies and fragments of interviews with the founders and collaborators of Radio Alice, forty years later. Franco Berardi (Bifo) takes part in both the documentary and the film.⁴¹²

There was no one person in charge at Radio Alice, the radio was open to everyone (one of the mottos of the radio was “to give a voice to whoever doesn’t have one”). To give a voice, and not to speak for someone else: Alice was providing a technical platform for people to speak. The voice was given primarily through a telephone, in a time when live telephonic broadcasts were almost unthinkable: in public radio the broadcasting was always filtered or censored. Alice was an “open microphone”, and Via del Pratello 47 was its open venue, an occupied flat from which the broadcasting took place: more and more people started going in via del Pratello to meet the speakers and take the microphone and play records themselves: “more and more mass participation to the radio, less and less the group of founders... in June 76 the group of founders was already blown up.” Alice was becoming everyone, becoming Alice, dispersed and disseminated: “the radio was right in wanting to live independently from me.”

Radio Alice was “political”, but not politically lined up, at least not as other radios, where politics meant serious engagement and serious discussions and debates. “I used to broadcast texts of science fiction, porno, everything that was the most far away from the political blah blah affecting Radio Alice as well”. Radio Alice was more about “life” than “politics”, it was “happiness”, “the possibility of entering relationships with others”. Radio Alice was “*i vissuti*”, the “lived” (it should be plural: liveds), it was “the drama of living in a factory”, the “refusal of work”. It was about “the body, health, affectivity, genders”... On the one hand “politics permeated all aspects of life”, and the revolution always seemed to be round the corner; on the other “the more the radio got a political line, the more it fell off”... “The radio couldn’t care less!”... “I consider the experience of the radio as going beyond politics”...

Radio Alice was “creative flux”, no one could interrupt the flux, “whoever felt like it, stayed at the mixer”, people were there 24 hours a day, they were living there, coming

⁴¹² All the following quotations, if not stated otherwise, are taken from the documentary in the DVD of *Lavorare con lentezza*, from the interviews with the people of Radio Alice; a longer version of the documentary titled *Alice è in paradiso* is available at the Library of the Gramsci Institute in Bologna.

or going, meeting and leaving, fighting with each other (“there were clashes between us”), sleeping together (“we used to sleep all together, we use to do everything together, there was an epidemic of scabies, and before it of crabs”), living and broadcasting.

Radio Alice was an experiment in communication, “an experiment in language”, using tactics of *détournement* (“using the same language of power in order to subvert it”) derived from the situationist experience. “We pretend to be in the place of power, we speak with its voice, we broadcast signals as if we would be the power, with its same tone of voice. We produce false information disclosing what power hides, information capable of producing a revolt against the force of the discourse of power. We reproduce the magical game of the falsifying truth to say with the language of mass media what they want to exorcise.” And here it is, Radio Alice, at the core of a chapter on Debord and the Situationist International.⁴¹³

But Radio Alice is “life”, it is life rather than media and communication. “We used to live a bit everywhere”... “how I used to get by I wouldn’t know now”... “we were never sleeping”... “we used to sleep all together, we used to do all together”... “we were reading and reading”, “we were not very fond of working”, “going to the cinema as a cortege and not paying”, “we discussed how you feel pleasure by taking a dick in your ass”, “he read fairytales like a father at home, as if we where the children”... “moreover, I have a daughter called Alice...”

Centrality of media and communication in politics, communication is a recurrent word in these interviews thirty years later, and of course, Radio Alice is also a radio, and radio is first of all a medium of communication. Radio Alice was a medium between people, a platform for people to come together, it was “the possibility of relating with others”. From the perspective of the medium the question would be today: what is the equivalent medium, what is the medium which could work today as a platform for people to come together, as Radio Alice was forty years ago? “The internet is today the most similar tool to what the radio was”. But there is an important difference because with the internet there is not always a Via del Pratello 47 to which one can go and meet people. Virtual reality and real reality, the debate could be endless, what Radio Alice seems to teach is the complexity of a coming together, taking place across many interwoven levels, which are not reducible to the alternative of virtual vs. real. Radio

⁴¹³ Collettivo A/traverso, *Alice è il diavolo*, op. cit., p. 14.

Alice is a radio to listen, a telephone to call, but at the same time it is certainly something else...

After the film I feel disappointed. Occasionally, with Hollywood-like movies, with commercial movies (but the director here claims this film to be experimental), it happens that I get fond of a character, but not in this case, not even this happens to me now. I go to sleep and I think about Radio Alice, I think of Bologna, images come back, the streets just round the corner where I used to live, under the shadow of the two towers, the shadow of the portico, the bar where I used to go in Via del Pratello, it looked like the bar in the film, full of grandpas. But the grandpas were behind the bar in Via del Pratello, and the floor was full of young scruffy people, and now, after ten years, the two grandpas are not there anymore, nor the scruffy people, and via del Pratello, with its pricey taverns seems to be centuries away from ten years ago, thirty years ago this year... During the night, I dreamt of Bologna, my friends, my classmates: we were in a park, lying on the grass, as we used to do sometimes, the day after going out in Bologna, sharing a walkman, waiting for the drunkenness to evaporate... I wake up, a lump in my throat, I think about the dissertation: what have I written, what would be the place of Radio Alice, of Bologna in it? What has it to do with all this, where is the place for myself laying in a park with my friends under the sun? I'm not able to answer... I've probably manufactured a schematic strategic plan, a rational plan coinciding with a "passion" that comes from elsewhere. Is it like this, is this the way, Radio Alice?

Lavorare con lentezza, working slowly, is the title of the song broadcasted by Radio Alice every morning. In its documentary, Guido Chiesa talks of '77 as a time where an idea of revolution finishes and another begins, when revolution as an event happening all of a sudden ends, and revolution as a slow work, "un lento lavoro", begins, a sort of everyday revolution we could say, a revolution which takes time and patience. But the "lavorare con lentezza" of the song has not to do with patience! Instead, it is the going slow, the slow working of the factory's sabotage. Radio Alice had not to do with revolution as a slow job, not with working slowly, but with a "refusal of work", and the consequent "blowing up" of the same group of founders, in the form of a sonic, affective, passionate firework. We don't fight to get more jobs or better jobs, we don't want to work anymore!

“Working slowly” as Guido Chiesa understands it, is what I fear to do myself, writing a pseudo-revolution in front of this laptop, day after day, patiently, perhaps because there is nothing else I can do, or I feel like doing, or I am brave enough of doing. They refused to work, they refused to produce a work, but often I feel that work is winning over this dissertation. Radio Alice, and Bologna coming back through it, transforms all that I’ve done, what I’ve written so far, into an ever more weak and precarious construction. I could easily write another paragraph to accommodate Radio Alice under the title “constructed situation”, or “subjectivation”, “experience”, “passion”, Radio Alice as a construction of modes of existence, forms of life... but forms of life that are not put at work, that do not produce work and are not classifiable. I could accommodate Radio Alice into the schema of a constructed situation as I have defined it here: the organization of the radio goes together with everything unsettling it. But I don’t want to do this, the dream I had is still vivid, my head is heavy, my eyes full of tears. Do I have to work slowly to carry on this war, with patience, discipline, is this the only thing I can do, the only way I can do it? I’m not going to do it today, I’m playing this music on purpose, my favourite songs ten years ago, I used to listen to it in Bologna, a gloomy music, rather different from Radio Alice. Today the stage is collapsing and all seems to be useless. Radio Alice, Bologna, or whatever I could name what is happening to me, I refuse to manage it for once, I cannot transform it into a weapon for a manual of activism. Where was the battle in Bologna ten years ago, where was the fight, and where was the battle, the fight of Radio Alice in the 70’s?

- I was lying on the bed.

- That’s ok, comrade, you were tired, you have the right to rest...

- Not at all, I was reading!

- You are right comrade, you were reading to improve your theoretical level and prepare yourself to new struggles...

- I don’t know. Maybe! I was reading “Diabolik”...⁴¹⁴

Radio Alice, this dream, Bologna coming back, all this is destroying my plans made of thin paper. I feel sick, I’m exhausted, I thought I’d slept last night, but I probably didn’t. I’m crying from anger, frustration... I don’t even know what I’m crying for. And I don’t want to cry, because my mother is in the other room, she could come in and see me (and

⁴¹⁴ Guattari, “Millions and Millions of Potential Alices” in Guattari, *Molecular Revolution : Psychiatry and Politics*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984.

today, the following day, where is all the anger, frustration, or whatever else, where is it in these words?)... I cry because there is something I cannot say - what is it, what was it, those same streets, myself and them, my friends, and Bifo, his friends, I didn't even know, I knew nothing about them, I used to spend the evenings getting drunk, and trying to make the day pass until the next evening.

I think about Bologna again, there was something else. It was an experiment, we were trying other ways of living together, six in a flat, my friend and I sleeping in the kitchen, "technical tests" for a counter-family. If we would have been in the 70's we would have been listening to Radio Alice, I'm sure, we would have been on the street as well. And maybe a city, a place, retains for some time what happens in it, possibly in its people, but surely in the streets, the walls, the pavements. I like to think this, to think there was something in Bologna, when I used to live there, something I didn't know of, but it was there, what happened before, in the same streets.

Maybe I'm crying because I feel I lost something forever, but on the other hand it seems to be so much here right now. I cry because I don't understand and I don't really know what to do with all this, and I don't want to do anything with it, and yet I have to try and I'm trying here. Maybe it is something I've lost, something the same people of Radio Alice have lost. When I see them talking about the radio today, in front of the camera, gray hair, someone fat, someone bald, almost unrecognizable, all probably dispersed, so many different paths taken, different jobs, some go-getting careers in the field of new technologies and communications, so far away... For a moment I think that Radio Alice has to do with being young. Young and somehow "innocent" (Bifo's book on 77 and Radio Alice is titled *On Innocence*), young and full of vigour, expectation, or unconsciousness... but I don't want to think about Radio Alice in these terms. Maybe it's because "it was if we were all of us like children": when you live on a sort of brink you don't want to exit, as in a protracted adolescence. In a black and white footage Bifo (is it him?) shouts with an hysterical voice and a hallucinated young face, *delirante*, delirious Bifo: "what is essential is that everyone is maaaad!!".

Maybe it is the black and white of the fragmented footages of the 70's, or the square, round the corner, repeatedly appearing in the film. Something I experienced myself, or something I'm making up, like a lost chance. The face of Bifo in this other footage, his voice, and gestures, he appears in black and white, difficult to recognize, as a boy, his

body possessed, haunted by an unrestrainable laughter, roaring in the microphone, perhaps he is someone else... “what we need”, says Bifo today, “are grimaces and sneers to exorcise the abyss”.⁴¹⁵

...

“Where you would never think it could happen, it will.”

It sounds like a promise, a self-comforting assurance of someone who has lost something forever a long time ago. And what will happen anyway - Bologna, again, Radio Alice again.

APPENDIX 3: Nanopolitics - how to think politics from and with the body (Grinberg)

“Nanopolitics: London-based open group of people (activists, researchers, artists, therapists) interested in collective processes at the intersection between the political, therapeutic and creative. We experiment with body and performance related methods and try to translate those to different contexts and struggles.”⁴¹⁶

It is not easy to state what nanopolitics is. From Contact Improvisation to Soma, Theatre of the Oppressed to Grinberg, Body-Mind Centering to other practices nameless or yet to be named, it continues to develop through a series of workshops open to everybody wherein different bodily techniques are experimented with.⁴¹⁷ Someone facilitates the session, we use our bodies, we discuss together: what happened, what is happening here, in relation with our lives? How is what we do here political? Which kind of politics is nanopolitics, and what can this become? How does nanopolitics relate and respond to our everyday life, at work, at home, at the university, in collectives we

⁴¹⁵ Franco Berardi on *Lavorare con lentezza*, in rekombinant.org and also in “Musica!”, insert of *La Repubblica*, 30/09/04.

⁴¹⁶ <http://nanopolitics.noblogs.org/>

⁴¹⁷ The least known of these techniques is probably Soma, developed in Brazil by Roberto Freire, a friend of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. Drawing from the studies of Wilhelm Reich, Roberto Freire developed a practice combining bodily games and discussions, designed as a therapy for people fighting against the Brazilian dictatorship in the '70s. See Jorge Goya, “Soma, an Anarchist Experiment” in Gavin Grindon, *Aesthetics and Radical Politics*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008, pp 56-62.

take part of? Can we trace the impact of nanopolitics in our lives? How do we carry what we do in the safe space of this room into the territories beyond it? How can nanopolitics be translated in contexts of struggle, in the streets, in demos and kettles, in meetings we organize?

Nanopolitics is “how to think politics from and with the body”, this is what all the sessions share: we think and practice politics, starting from the middle of our bodies. There are always moments of discussions, but for once our bodies come first, they are placed at the fore. You can think with the body, and to think with the body is to think differently, at a different speed, for example. We develop a different attentiveness, we learn to perceive what is almost imperceptible, to listen in a different way. To think with the body is to think through affects, and these exercises produce affects which sometimes approach an intensity that is not easy to bear.

Nanopolitics is to see, think, and critically discuss what happens when bodies are brought together, when different bodies connect, move together, entangle. To use our bodies in such a way is something we rarely do in our everyday life. We learn to tune into each other’s body, and there is much lightness in this. It is like starting again, but from the middle of our bodies, sensing what our bodies can do, what their encounter can produce: joy, intensities, commotion... Internalized relational habits get undone, and different, non-hierarchical ways of communicating, trusting each other, taking care of each other, are developed. We shift from (flexible) hierarchies to tuning, as a careful modality of testing how our bodies are poised, what boundaries they are circumscribed by, and whether and how these boundaries can be reconfigured. Such bodily tuning has the potential to reverberate everywhere else in our lives, across different settings and situations.

How does all this relate with Bataille? Bataille too uses his body and experiments with bodily practice to rethink and perform a different politics. We set up safe environments, protecting ourselves in conditions of vulnerability, and as a way of constructing a setting where experimentation can take place. Here I will talk of the “case” of Grinberg, a session of nanopolitics that particularly resonates with Bataille’s theory and practice. But before, I would like to add a remark, to specify the singularity of nanopolitics in relation with Bataille. Bataille is driven by a desire, need, indeed a compulsion to continuously undo the established forms of subjectivity and institutional orthodoxies

across which the coordinates of the body are usually distributed. Nanopolitics always implies such an undoing, driven by a desire to construct something otherwise, a different way of caring for each other and the worlds within which we live. In this sense nanopolitics appears here, in the middle of this dissertation, but continues somewhere else, up to the “Conclusions”, and beyond (bringing together Felix Guattari and Silvia Federici).

Merav comes from Berlin to facilitate a session using the Grinberg Method. This is the second nanopolitics session dedicated to fear – the first employing the Theatre of the Oppressed and Soma in relation to experiences undergone at demonstrations and in kettles. Merav speaks of fear, to make us think fear differently: fear is everywhere, in a given territory, for example, animals are subject to fear all the time, they live together on its basis, they don't reject and fight fear as we usually do. We have always been told not to have fear: we always try to prevent fear, suppress fear, ensure that fear is kept away. Merav proposes that we deal with fear not with our mind (the voices that tell me this and that, my inner paranoid self, a voice which differs from that of the intellect, says Merav) but with our body. We learn to listen to our body and understand what happens when we are afraid, we sense the tensions in our body and play with them. The idea is not to suppress those tensions but to manipulate them, making use of fearful images and voices in our mind: we deal with fear with our body instead of letting fear become anxiety and paranoia in our minds.

“Fear can also be fun, it doesn't have to be serious.”

We start with a series of exercises to learn to feel and listen to our body, and to energize it: we cannot face fear with a low bodily energy, which is what we do most of the time, the result of which is fear becoming a pathology.

The core exercise consists in visualizing a situation of fear that will take place for us in the future. We localize and read the tensions that happen in our bodies, then we tense the body even more, and more, and finally we release it...

“And let go..., it's ok, it's ok not to know, it's ok not to know what's going to happen, not to know how should I do it, not to know about myself...” this is Merav's refrain.

Merav talks of two types of fear, old and new, past and present fear. The first comes from the past, we have accustomed ourselves to it, it is inscribed in our body, and we feel it as something leaden: it is more difficult to deal with this kind of fear, stratified

within our body. The second is present fear, fear for something new that happens to us, not directly connected with bodily memory: in this case there is often a component of excitement in fear.

What, then, in the context of this experience, is the pattern I fall into habitually, and how can I confound its perpetuation? How could I make of fear an ally, a friend, a companion, instead of turning it into paranoia, panic, anxiety?

Exercises:

“You don’t know what is going to happen
You don’t know and you don’t need to know
You are open to what is going to happen
You don’t know who you are
I just don’t know and that’s ok
I don’t know what I should be...”

-Shake the body by going up and down moving the heels.

-Humming (mmmmmmmmmmmm...), let the vibration resonate through your entire body, up to the hands, to the feet and the ground.

-Breath heavily: breath with a strong breath, the strongest you are capable of.

“4 times 7”: – breathe in for 7 seconds, hold the breath for 7 seconds, breathe out for 7 seconds, hold the breath for 7 seconds, and so on.

-Exercise to become aware of what surrounds you, shift the attention from yourself to a perception of and connection with the surrounding.

-To go around with eyes closed (whilst breathing heavily) and listen to what fear does in your body. Fear of not being able to see, fear of hitting the wall or someone else, fear of touching someone else.

“The worst that can happen to you is to fall on the ground, and so what, that’s not a big deal...”

-Move with music: you make a (2 seconds) movement using any parts of your body (you can also use face and mouth) and then you freeze. And then again, you carry on in a different unforeseeable direction, and then you stop again, and so on. Pay attention to the stops, to the still body, and not to the way you should move it (there’s no right way to move it). This is a way to learn to perceive the body. When we dance or when we do things like yoga we don’t pay attention to the body: with yoga and similar practices we

have to follow codified movements, when we dance we follow the music and a more or less coherent style of dancing.

-Gathering energy exercise (15 minutes). Your stare in front of you, your eyes looking laterally as much as they can, the pelvis goes back and forth, the knees are bent, the hands open flat, parallel to the floor and touching each other. You make a circle with your hands moving them at the level of the pelvis, clockwise, you start from the belly and inhale for half a circle pulling the pelvis back, you exhale for the other half and pull the pelvis forth so that the hands go back to the belly. You gather energy at every circle, until your body starts to shiver. This exercise looks like an orgasmic ritual (Grinberg has studied both Wilhelm Reich and shamanic practices in Israel and Latinamerica). After about ten minutes you visualize a fearful situation which is going to happen to you in the future, and you pay attention to what happens within your body (a tension in the chest, in the throat, in the neck – not in the belly, as I imagined, the belly comes after, as a side effect – Merav rubs my breastbone strongly, she takes my head and moves it in circle, as if to loosen it, she touches my throat). You exaggerate this tension in your body, you do it more and more, and after a while you let go and breathe, breathe heavily.

“I just don’t know what is going to happen and that’s ok...”

You are still *together* with fear, but in a different way, you breath heavily and your body expands. At some point you partly lose consciousness.

Now we are on the floor: “Let your body open, don’t curl, let your body expand: energy flows from it, whilst fear is together with you (fear is also that energy).”

If there’s anger in your body, you let the anger out, you stamp your feet on the ground, you let your body do whatever it “wants” to do (it feels like the body is disconnected from the mind, and has almost an independent “will”).

Merav does the “gathering energy” exercise first, as a demonstration for us. At some point she start shivering, more and more violently, it seems as if she is having a violent orgasm, or as if her body gets possessed. Then the features of her face change, this is the moment of fear, she becomes darker, her eyes fall backwards.

We do the exercise ourselves, I know that if I start shivering it’s ok. After a while I do shiver, not much, but sometimes my body trembles, it moves by itself as though through an unconditioned reflex. We end the exercise on the floor, she comes to me and starts rotating my head. The exercise ends, I am completely absent from myself. “And now a

volunteer... you!” I really wanted to go (“I felt your body wanted to do it” she told me afterwards). This is another demonstration, I wanted to work more with her, we will deal with the fear of talking in public and in class that I mentioned at the beginning of the day. “It works well if the fear is related to your job.” She asks me questions, I try to answer, but I cannot really talk, my face is almost paralyzed, as if anaesthetized. “Don’t worry, it’s because of some techniques I used moving your head.” She asks me to imagine myself in class, she asks me what do I feel, what do I think about myself, what do I think the students think of me. “They think I shouldn’t be there, they think I’m not appropriate for that job, they think I’m not really a teacher. They think there is something wrong with me...” (at this point my friend Molli, as she will later tell me, starts crying). I feel calm, I can answer the questions, but my body is reacting in a different way. It was as if the body was detached from myself, or the mind was detached from my body. I started stamping my foot on the floor. Molli told me afterwards that she never saw me like that, so angry, that she thought I was going to punch someone in the face.

“And let go... and breathe...” Through breathing my chest expands in space (Molli says that my body changed, my chest had never been so wide). “And now look at people in their eyes.” Some of them are turning their face away. Some of them are visibly upset. For me as well it is hard to look at them in their faces. “Now you are a teacher!” says Merav. I try to smile, but it’s hard, what does it mean that I am a teacher now?

Afterwards Maria comes to me and says “You are complacent with people, I see this because I am complacent myself, and like you I repress anger into my body.” Then from now I don’t want to be complacent anymore, I want to be able to tell people to fuck off, I don’t want to hide myself behind a smile.

For a whole day I feel full of energy, then at some point in the afternoon of the following day, a heavy pain suddenly strikes my back and lasts for several days.

...

The aim of these exercises is not to overcome fear, but to experience fear with your body, and to open yourself to the unknown that comes with fear, to open and expand your body to this unknown.

Fear of the unknown: we protect ourselves from this unknown (from this NOTHING) in many ways. For example, do I not play a character, “myself”, that is perceived as constructed as such by myself and by others? Merav calls this “image”, the image of oneself, one’s identity.

-Image exercise. With the help of a questionnaire you figure out what is your image, the image of yourself, the character that you and others have constructed of yourself (complacent, sweet, smiley, shy...). This is the image of yourself that you use in order to avoid fearful situations with other people, or to come to terms with them.

I don’t want to be like someone else wants me to be. I want to free myself from this image. I want to face other people without a fixed image of myself in mind.

-Looking exercise (group): to look into each other’s eyes in a circle, to look at each other in a different way, in order to break away from our images, from our identities, from the masks we use for ourselves (Maria says at the end that all the faces appeared different to her).

-Looking exercise (pair): to look someone in the eyes, standing, palm against palm, the hands pressing against each other. To look without an image, to look into the eyes of the other, and produce a certain energy through this exchange.

In the discussion we talk of power and domination and their difference. To empower myself (through these exercises) could be a way to empower us, as a group. But it could also be used as a way of dominating others. The question is whether we could think a politics for the Grinberg Method. Not much comes out from the discussion. We are all very tired, some of us have been crying for most of the day, some of us are upset. I propose to use these techniques at the next demo.

This section on Grinberg serves also to understand Bataille differently, from the perspective of a therapeutic method using affects and the body. Bataille and the Grinberg Method have some fundamental features in common, as I sensed that very day we practiced Grinberg with Merav. They both start from a “negative” to be rejected (fear for instance), and through the use of the body the negative turns into something else (fear becomes a force that to some extent we deal with). The force of the “negative” is determined in its capacity to affect our body, break our subjectivity and open up our identity; it can either be produced through the body (gathering energy exercise) or come to affect the bodies from the outside (the unknown that produces fear, nonknowledge, the nothing Grinberg teaches us to deal with). A liberation from a fixed identity is

produced, and not with the aim of creating another identity in turn: such freedom from identity will allow us to be able to enter into a different composition each time we find ourselves in a different situation. A state of bareness, of abandonment, is required for the method to be effective (*but* this abandonment is always monitored and controlled by the Grinberg practitioner – and it never turns into something like a becoming animal).

How do the two “therapies” differ? There is a crucial difference, crucial because it is what distinguishes Bataille’s method from mysticism, from fascism, as Bataille himself insists. In the latter’s work there is a radical destruction of any framework, of any even provisional finality. There is no possibility of recuperation. And there is also a violence that the Grinberg practitioners are precluded from employing, otherwise they would lose their clients. In Grinberg, as in mysticism or in fascism, there is a broader machinery that accommodates these exercises on subjectivation. Grinberg is a therapy for the wellbeing of the patient and most of all for the wellbeing of the worker, of his or her company, and of capitalism as a whole. It encloses the subject in such a way that capitalism can take advantage from it.

The Grinberg Method is often used by corporations. A powerful method bringing together Reich, shamanism and bodily practices, gets a copyright and is made available to whoever can provide the capital to consume it (around £100 for a one to one session). It is extraordinary to see how these techniques, coming from a Freudian and Marxist tradition (Reich), become the perfect tools for today’s neoliberal workers, for the requirements of being as flexible as possible, of facing danger and risk, of dealing with all sorts of unforeseen situations.

Grinberg and other methods help capitalism making use of bodily energies and the forces of the unknown. Grinberg develops our ability to cope with the new and the unknown, to unleash creativity through our bodies, to free ourselves from a fixed identity, with the aim not just to shift from one identity to the other, but to remain always open to the possible, to any (working) situation. These are techniques of deterritorialization. What characterises capitalism’s deterritorialization? This “possible” we are supposed to face fearlessly is always regulated and structured by the logic of profit (of capitalism).

We have to re-appropriate these powerful tools and turn them “against” capitalism. To use these exercises in demos and kettles and meetings? “Free Grinberg for anti-capitalists!” We need to reclaim these techniques and practices to create something else. “Anticapitalism” here would not designate a simple opposition to capitalism, we cannot fight capitalism from such a standpoint, we need to double its entire framework, as Bataille tries to do, moving from a framework of ends (profit, possession, accumulation, private property), to the undoing of the framework itself, its axioms and ends. We cannot reduce ourselves to be the adversaries of capitalism. We find ways to escape the modes of classification and individuation that capitalism wants for us, “anti-capitalists”. No, we are much more than that, much more than “anti-capitalists”.

This comparison between Bataille and the Grinberg Method also shows us how Bataille’s deterritorialization is irreducible to today’s capitalist deterritorialization. This makes Bataille more contemporary than ever, a claim propounded by Jean-Joseph Goux, for example, who already in 1990 takes Bataille to be prophetic: “Perhaps Bataille’s economic theory is explained not by his discovery of potlatch in primitive societies, but by the presentiment of what capitalism is becoming.”⁴¹⁸ But is today’s capitalism really functioning as Bataille’s “project” functions? Is today’s capitalism exposing itself to its own collapse as a project in the same way Bataille exposes his own project to collapse?

Goux reads too rigidly the distinction Bataille makes between expenditure and usefulness; he looks only at *La parte maudite*, but Bataille’s critique of usefulness has to be read in a wider context, not only in relation to capitalist economy: Bataille’s critique of usefulness is a critique of ends, a critique of telos, of the single homogenous development of a machinery, a development which is constituent of capitalism, no matter how “irrationally” capitalism behaves. Capitalism is not only an economic system, it is a form of life, analogous to the overarching authority that religion once exercised (the association is to be found in Goux’s essay). Bataille is certainly not nostalgic for religion, he is not on the side of the sacred in opposition to the profane (as Goux, Agamben and many others state): his aim is not to recuperate an ancient system, to sanctify the sacred over and the against the profane, but to make use of the forces of ruination, rot and decay so as to spoil the “livelihood” of capitalism.

⁴¹⁸ Jean-Joseph Goux, “General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism”, in *Yale French Studies*, No. 78, *On Bataille* (1990), pp. 206-224, p 223.

The solidity of Grinberg as a Method is countered by an impossibility of fixing Bataille to his own method, the cleanness of Grinberg is spoiled by the filthiness of Bataille, the professionalism of Grinberg by the inappropriateness, the ridiculousness, the “B” of Bataille. “There is something slightly wrong with myself...” what can I make of this slight “wrong” of myself, how can this become political, how can I turn it against capitalism instead of curing it for the sake of a capitalist health?

APPENDIX 4: **From a conversation across balconies to a rolling parmesan**

In the first chapter of the dissertation I started writing from my room, avoiding an exposure of myself: I listen to a conversation across balconies, I read books, I write... What can I do with the nothing I have, and also what can I do if instead of waiting for something to come to me, into my room, I start going out looking for something? What if I improvise myself as an ethnographer? I could make some research on this neighbourhood by interviewing its people (following a suggestion of Howard Caygill).

I leave my room to explore the neighbourhood of Don Bosco. This neighbourhood was founded under Mussolini’s government. Whilst Bataille was writing about fascism, the first houses were built in the place where I am writing in this moment. The neighbourhood was later nicknamed “Shanghai” because it was considered dangerous and isolated from the rest of the city. Its original fascist name was Dux, it then became “Don Bosco” because of the church dedicated to Saint Giovanni Bosco, built by the workers of the neighbourhood between 1941 and 1947. The Dux district was isolated from the rest of the city. It was like a large village, but a rather strange one, its inhabitants came from every part of Italy to work in the industries across the river: Lancia, Montecatini, Magnesio and others. Lancia, which became Fiat, then Iveco, is where my grandfather, my godmother, and both my parents, who met each other there, used to work. Workers speaking different dialects had to live together, and share the semirurali (semi-rural) houses, small houses of four flats, surrounded by a perimeter of land, where workers could grow vegetables and stay in contact with “the good land”.

Ennio Marcelli tells the story of the semirurali and Don Bosco in books like *La parrocchia San Giovanni Bosco nel quartiere delle semirurali*. In this passage he

compares the semirurali with the adjacent Europa district, built in the 1970s (both are areas where people of different provenance had to live together): “The new buildings housed people coming from different places, and the new neighbourhood got populated not just by Italian but also by many German and Ladin families. The lack of common origins, the heterogeneity, and the difficulty for people to establish social relations, because of the lack of adequate structures, created in the Europa neighbourhood an uneasy situation similar to that experienced in the ‘40s in the Semirurali neighbourhood. The difference is that in the Semirurali there were continuous occasions for people to meet each other and talk: in the alleys, at the margins of the gardens, or in the square. Here in the Europa neighbourhood people can meet by chance on a pavement, a pedestrian pathway, or amongst the shelves of a supermarket.”⁴¹⁹ So much has changed in half a century: different houses, different urban plans, different ways to get in contact with the “foreign”.

All my grandparents used to live in Don Bosco, I have childhood memories of the small houses and the countryside around them. I remember my grandmother harvesting grapes not far away from her house. My grandparents are all gone now, and even when they were alive they were not very keen on talking about their past life. To know more about the neighbourhood I asked my godmother, who works in a recreational centre for old people near the house of my parents.

From the outside the centre looks like a wide and silent building. I looked for the entrance and round the corner I found a crowd of old people playing cards, chatting, playing bowls and skittles. I found my godmother straight away, she introduced me to an old man, and the three of us go to the director’s office. This is not a very informal situation as I had wished, but probably my godmother thought it was a good idea to talk directly with the boss. That’s ok, I think, I can interview them both at the same time. She explains to him that I would like him to talk about the neighbourhood. “When did you move to Don Bosco?” I ask to both of them. “1960”. Not a very good start. And they hadn’t even lived in the semirurali.

I ask the man to talk about the semirurali, but he starts talking about himself, when he was eighteen, and he got sent to the Russian front during the second world war. “My

⁴¹⁹ Ennio Marcelli, *La parrocchia San Giovanni Bosco nel rione delle semirurali*, Pluristamp, 1994, p 122.

battalion was called Gemona, and because we marched through Bronzolo [a village just before Bolzano coming from the south] I stopped to visit my mother, but the battalion in the meantime carried on marching, and the Carabinieri came to my mother's house and detained me as a deserter for three days, until the following battalion came, and I had to join it, and you know what? Every single soldier of the Gemona battalion died on the Russian front... Then I got a hole in my leg and a Polish old woman said to me, come here I'm going to cure you with some herbs." The man is unstoppable, it is impossible to ask questions, both because he is rather deaf and doesn't understand much, and because he talks and talks without catching his breath.

My godmother is slightly irritated, she shakes her fan nervously, "Uff, it's hot in here", it's summer, this time as well. She tries to stop the man a couple of times but unsuccessfully, she would like him to talk about the neighbourhood, because that's the reason why I'm here. "You are not interested in my stories, ah, lady? But the young man is interested, aren't you?" "Yes, very much so, sir". He names many places that I have never heard of, often Italian names the fascist government made up to replace the German ones: "You know about geography, don't you, young man? You know where Xyz is?". The man talks too fast, I cannot take note of all those names. "When I was in Yzx they put us on a train and the next day we were in a concentration camp at the Austro-German border. I joined a group of prisoners who were going to work outside the camp for a farmer. The farmer was giving us food, not at his table, but still he was feeding us. It was October and he had short leather trousers and beneath them long underpants to the ankles, that was funny!" Inexplicably for me, both the man and my godmother burst into laughter. "He gave us some Knoedeln [a popular traditional food in South Tirol] and I put some of them into my shirt, to save them for later!"

The stories are punctuated by the appearance of different kinds of food, some unknown to me, from "uova ingallate" [fertilized eggs] to buckets of jelly with bits of meat inside. My godmother was muttering from time to time: "Umm, that's tasty..." "One day I come back from work and the soldiers that I came together with were gone. New soldiers came instead: a commander of the Italian navy was captured by the Germans and sent to the concentration camp. They were important soldiers, they were studying at the university, and I was asked to be their interpreter, because they could speak many languages but not German. We were sent to a village to work in a steel factory, I was working at the *Drehbank*, you know what this is? You must know this, lady." My

godmother used to work with a lathe at Lancia together with my mother. “No, I don’t, what is it?” “It’s the lathe!” In his vortex of words the man was mixing German terms, and he was sometimes shifting to a sort of Veneto dialect.

“There was a giant man with huge moustaches working as a blacksmith in the factory, he was spitting on us every morning because we were Italian. One day an old man asks me why do I speak German if I’m Italian, and I say that I come from Riva. He asks about my father’s name. As soon as he hears the name he stands to attention. My father was a decorated general and it turns out that this man had worked in his service. He told me that a friend of my father was living in that village, and that I should write to him, that he could help me, he was an important man. I write the letter and after two weeks a man comes and tells me – stop working and come with me, you get 5 days holiday – I think, holiday? But, I’m a prisoner... Anyway, I follow the man to his house and there his beautiful lady hugs me and cries: they were close friends of my parents. They give me their son’s shoes and clothes, I wash myself and shave, they tell me that I can stay with them but I need to find a job. But I have a job already! I say I would like to go back to the steel factory. Fine, they say. I went back to the factory and things were changed for me. I was allowed to take care of the Italians outside the factory. We became best friends with the giant blacksmith, he always had a watering can full of cider with him, and we used to go with him to work for farmers who were giving us food, so we always had some food to share in the factory. Amongst the Italians there was a singer, he had studied singing, he had a beautiful voice, and together with a priest I secretly organized a mass sung with and for the Italians. The people of the village were not supposed to know, but the Italian soldier was singing so well Schubert’s *Ave Maria* that the whole village gathered outside listening. Are you interested in my stories, young man? I could write a book about all this!”

My godmother takes advantage of the short pause and asks about the neighbourhood. But every time he flies somewhere else, telling another story. “Ah, yes, the neighbourhood, many Italians from the North came here to live.” “But there were also Italians from the South.” I say. “Those came later, that’s why the neighbourhood was called Shanghai, it was scary when they came, you know, they came from all parts of South Italy, and even from Sicily.” I don’t want to hear that, I don’t like this, that’s not how the neighbourhood was, and you were not even living in the neighbourhood when they came, what do you want to know about North and South Italians living together

here? It is the first time he talks about something “scary”, and it is Italian people from the South, after telling all these stories where death is round the corner, stories where he never talks about an enemy, where it is difficult to decide who is good and who is bad, where things keep shifting and changing: German soldiers turn out to be Polish and the next second they put away the rifle and pull out a bottle of wine and drink it with you, German soldiers (a “German soldier” is a soldier with a German uniform) turn out to be Italians driving in a van to join the resistance.

“Because you know that Germans enlisted into the German army Italians who lived here? How come you don’t know this? But how old are you? Anyway, I was going home, walking, I was already close to Riva, and the German troops were going back to Germany, and an old lady told me – Don’t go that way, they are going to kill you! I was just 20 Km away from home, I didn’t want to stop now, beside, I knew the area quite well. And you know what I found on the way? A whole parmesan! The German left it behind whilst fleeing. It was a bit cracked but it was a whole cheese! I got the parmesan and started rolling it down the wood. Then I hid it behind a rock, but when I came back only the crust was left, eaten by ants!” This is a very different second world war to the one I knew, with the Italians, the Germans, the Russians and so on, either enemies or allies. I would have expected fascism forging “armours of identity”, and instead all these stories sound like a chaotic and incoherent game of identities and their betrayal.

Something like a microfascism, with the construction of an armour of identity, seems to appear rather after the war, when the man comes back to Bolzano. “And after the war you moved to Bolzano...” I try again to bring him back to the neighbourhood. “Yes, I was working in a post office in Via Firenze. I didn’t want to get married, you know, my girlfriend had a good job in Riva and she had to leave it to come to Bolzano and get married, I didn’t get much money from the post office, so I had to work more, and different jobs, so that I managed to send my sons to the university.” He even switched on the computer to show me a picture of her daughter shaking hands with the pope. This was it, this was the end of all his stories, this was just the beginning of an endless working period, working beyond his grave, because that’s the inheritance for the son, who also works now seven days a week. This is the time in which the scary Italians come to Bolzano from the South. Beside the picture of the daughter there are two scanned images of old photographs in the same folder, a beautiful girl and a good looking boy – it’s impossible to recognize the old man in that handsome face.

“Well, you didn’t get much about the neighbourhood, I’m afraid”, says my godmother at the end. “But you liked my stories, didn’t you young man?” “Yes, thank you very much for that”. My godmother shows me briefly around the centre, I would like to ask her about the neighbourhood, she was here as well, but she is too busy now, people keep asking for her, she has to leave, “I’ll see you in December when you come back”, but we probably won’t see each other, I don’t see her often anyway. She disappears in the crowd. Ok, done, I go. But the old man comes to me again. This time, spontaneously, without any question, he starts talking about “the neighbourhood”, that is, about his life as an adult. He tries, but there is not much to say. He talks fast as before but there is no story to tell. He doesn’t ask me whether I like his stories anymore. He talks about his other jobs beside the post office, “And, you see, I’m retired but I’m still working”, and it is not really with pride that he says that, now this sounds like a complaint, it is as if, my godmother gone, he comes back, perhaps not so proud of a daughter shaking hands with the Pope anymore. He talks a bit more about his son and his daughter, but it is just more about jobs and nothing else. I’m tired, bored, depressed. He might sense it. “My son likes mountains very much, he likes trekking, climbing...” “But he doesn’t have the time to do that, does he?” And that’s the end, really, he doesn’t know how to reply, he doesn’t have anything else to say. “Thank you again, sir, I wish you good luck.”

APPENDIX 5: Microfascist theatre: America’s Next Top Model as “semiotic subjugation”

My flatmates have been watching America’s Next Top Model for months now, they seem addicted to it. They sometimes spend entire afternoons eating popcorn and watching ANTM. They have taken a whole terminology and vocabulary of gestures from it, which they perform in the house every day, with great fun. For months I have “protected” myself behind a disdainful disapproval “I have to work, I don’t have time to waste for these kind of things.” But you see your flatmates pulling weird faces and postures in the house all the time, whilst shouting “smise!”, “eyebrow!”, “toes!” and you have to find out.

At first I was disgusted but my flatmates took care of me and helped me overcome the repulsion. After a couple of episodes I was sort of hooked. Not that I have ever watched

ANTM after that day, but here I am writing on it. ANTM is a reality show where girls compete to become America's next top model. This implies not only the winning of a prize but also the beginning of a modelling career for the winner. It is reality in the sense that is a TV show which, for the participants, is (free) work already. There is no need for a narration anymore, a simple format suffices, from telenovelas as the everyday production of domesticated affections for domesticated bodies, to ANTM: what's the point of paying actors and writers if I can use real people who do it for free? To develop feelings of hatred or sympathy is easier with real people in real situations, it echoes even more our working situations. We shift from the housewife to the young woman establishing herself in the job market. The competition is already fierce in ANTM's selection stage. What you see on screen is a crude exposition of the mechanisms that regulate the job market, not only the fashion industries, but any sector of the job market, something that has to do with most of us. The reality TV is "educational" inasmuch it teaches us to enjoy the fiercest competition: look, it can be fun!

ANTM reminds of the work of Santiago Sierra, in which the artist pays Mexican men to masturbate in front of the camera, or when he pays them to tattoo a line on their back. Of course Sierra's work, presented in galleries and museums, is supposed to provoke a critical reflection on the global (art) market, on exploitation, the commodification of bodies. ANTM comes after Sierra, and the dynamics of the market, exploitation and commodification are exposed and exhibited as entertainment: exploitation becomes fun.

Of course there are gender issues, the female stereotype of the brainless beauty gets reinforced, not because the participants are necessarily stupid, it's clear they have to perform all the time, they are instructed to laugh and scream in the most idiotic ways. What appears as a bunch of "stupid hens" is just part of the "reality" of the show. Beyond the crying, the laughter, the dictated interviews, you can sometimes feel a slight anxiety, not anxiety about losing the prize, but anxiety in taking part in something like that, in a situation where you are totally and publicly exposed to the rules and dynamics of the working "game" (is this part of the show, am I supposed to feel that?).

The participants are pitted against each other, enmities, rows and anger are instigated from behind the scenes, they spice up the programme, and there you can see the real affective rage, the angry frustration generated by an incitement to compete. Competition is the tool that turns an emerging and indefinite anger originating in your social life and

working conditions into a very private affair, me against you, bitch. All this to generate greater profit by paying the workers less or nothing, by making them believe that an amazing opportunity is given to you, like making tea and coffee at the Victoria Miro gallery.

At the core of the programme there is not only (our) slavery and exploitation, but also a practice of instruction, not only because the girls have to look stupid in a “funny” way, but because what they have to do is to be trained, they have to learn how to use their body, how to move their body, how to gesture. This training has strict rules but also rewards “creativity”, “personality” and “originality”. This is, of course, always within the strict limits of what is to be judged as “excellence” by the jury of experts, in the strict limits of what Guattari calls a “semiotic subjugation”.⁴²⁰

But this instruction pertains not only to those who participate but those who watch as well. Viewing here is not “passive”, just as for centuries a popular narrative production triggered an extensive amateur literature, ANTM (and other TV programmes) give rise to homemade re-enactment, sometimes made public on youtube. Beauty, fashion, charm, there is something really seductive in all this, perhaps it is its lightness, the lightness of this kind of desire, its impalpability. In ANTM desire is put at work, it is a desire to win, to succeed, to become a Top Model; but there is also another kind of desire at stake, one produced through the body and its surface, far away from the open, broken, obscene body of Bataille. This is what Bataille is countering, microfascism, ANTM as a microfascist “theatre” which, making use of affects and desires, instructs people to pose and move beautifully. Can we start from these configurations of desire to produce a double, rather than radically shifting from these clean and sanitized gestures to Bataille’s dirty gestures? Is it possible to move away from the sanitization that this training of the body imposes (where whatever is deemed “improper” is expelled from the body’s terrain) whilst retaining something of the lightness and superficiality of that desire?

⁴²⁰ Guattari, “Molecular Revolution” in *Chaosophy, op. cit.*, pp 278-9 and Guattari, “Desire is Power, Power is Desire”, also in *Chaosophy*, p 282. The ANTM’s jury is one of the most revolting element of the series, with the “properness” of their discourse and with their admonitions, verdicts and punishments that make participants tremble, cry, feel guilty, a piece of meat at the mercy of the whims of the “powerful” with a human face.

Angelea presented herself to ANTM's selection after sleeping a night in a bus station: she had no money to pay for a hotel. She got rejected because her appearance was too rough, she came from the "ghetto", and she didn't get a "beuty sleep" on the bench of the bus station. But she persisted, she tried again, the second time she got accepted. Angelea participates in the few episodes of ANTM I watched. I sort of fell in love with her, I desperately wanted her to win, it might be because I never watch this kind of thing and I got affected more easily. That's how I got "hooked" by ANTM, at least until Angelea lost. Apparently, according to the jury, her performance was brilliant at the beginning, but then something changed. "Angelea, you lost confidence!" She is not really sure anymore about this whole game. I wondered if I was supposed to "fall in love" with her, if this was part of the show. I fall in love because I can see in her eyes that she hates this crap, or at least I can imagine this, she hates this humiliating game that she is supposed to play – but she is learning something through all this (Angelea will reappear briefly towards the end of the thesis).

APPENDIX 6: **Christmas Diary**

"In a sense my book is the day-to-day record of what turned up as the dice were thrown – without, I hasten to say, there being a lot by way of resources. I apologize for the truly comical year of personal interests chronicled in my diary entries. They are not a source of pain, and I'm glad to make fun of myself, knowing no better way to lose myself in immanence."⁴²¹

13-14 December 2009

I land in Bologna, to visit my friends Milena, Martino and their baby Ettore. The same day Berlusconi gets hit by a souvenir of the Milan cathedral, a passerby throws a small reproduction of the church at the prime minister's face. "It's a miracle" say the newspapers the day after, showing his face covered in blood, and the miracle is not that someone managed to smash his face, I don't quite understand what the miracle is, it is probably related to the Madonnina at the top of the cathedral that used to be the symbol of Milan. Some people think it was arranged, fictional, there was no blood on Berlusconi's face at first, he goes into the car, puts an handkerchief onto his face, and gets out the car with the face covered in blood, ready to be photographed. And ready to

⁴²¹ Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, Continuum, 2004, p xxiii

make harsher the “anti-terrorist” legislation. And of course to rekindle his audience’s feelings when the popularity of his character appeared compromised by *papi*’s moral judges.

We smoke a cigarette on the balcony and we discuss this: “Now he has become a martyr...” The conversation shifts towards the state of Italian prisons and the violence of the police. In the last few years the Italian police have beaten to death several Italian citizens in prisons, one anorexic boy affected by epilepsy (“we didn’t know he was epileptic” they said – but anorexia would not be so difficult to recognize...), another was a father of a child who had some marijuana plants in his garden, they broke into the house at night, they took him away, he never returned home... Three cases like this made public, and no one knows how many more there might be involving “illegal” migrants – those epitomes of a bareness of life which Agamben analyses as everybody’s contemporary condition.

The day after I have to take a train to Bolzano, but before going to the station, I take Ettore to the kindergarten. We don’t see each other often, and he is only two years old, but we like each other. I put him in the pushchair and we head towards the kindergarten. He laughs because I’m not very good at pushing the stroller. One of the things I like about this baby, something that probably other babies have too, is that he seems not to care so much for the appearance of people, he seems to see or perceive something else in people, relating with them despite their appearance, or maybe according to parameters I don’t know. We are in the kindergarten now and we stop laughing. I cannot say to him “See you later Ettore” as I had said the day before, because I’m leaving and I don’t know when I’m going to see him again. He acts strangely. I smile at him but it isn’t reciprocated. His friends come towards him and I leave him together with them. I’m on the street again now, and I start crying. I walk and cry, and try to take away the tears from my face, and I think, that’s crazy, why should I cry... I feel like being in a movie, something like the end of *Vive l’amour*.

14 December

On the train to Bolzano I read *The Coming Insurrection*. I get excited about this book, Agamben’s ideas become concrete, materialized through an analysis of the contemporary, Agamben is pushed further, not just a little further but radically further away, there is nothing else to do in order to make things better, the collapse is

irreversible, what we can do is to create something else, through communes, autonomous forms of collective life, protecting ourselves from the police and the aggressiveness of constituted power. Agamben, who, according to Negri and others, never took part in his youth in political actions, gets hijacked by this *Tiqqun*, this Invisible Committee, his philosophy feeds into a political “activism” which is no less radical than that practiced by Negri and friends in the ‘70s.⁴²² This hijacking of Agamben could explain why, when the Invisible Committee gets arrested by the French police, accused of authoring a “manual for terrorism”,⁴²³ Agamben writes an article in *Liberation* that comes to their defence.⁴²⁴

The second part of the book has the form of a manual, a manual of instructions. I like this part less because this manual is a bit too instructive, the Invisible Committee tells us “how to do it” but also “what to do” in a too specific way. Too specific for the “communes” not to become exclusive again, too specific to be transversal, too specific not to leave out many people who would not feel like embracing weapons, or setting up a commune. And many people wouldn’t know how to start, this is why, in this “manual”, I prefer to start from myself, from a middle. I look for an Italian translation of the text and I send by email the first part of the text to my Italian friends with the title “regalo di natale” (Christmas present). The email starts with the “first circle” of a contemporary hell, titled “I AM WHAT I AM”. I like to start with this section on the construction and management of the self as an individual, and as a cheerful individual, for the promotion of a cheerful subjectivity: let’s leave what troubles us at home, let’s keep it inside ourselves, buried in ourselves, cheerfulness defuses “our inadaptability, our fatigue”. Our fatigue, our problems can be *activated* if we start to unfasten them from our individuality, if we create collective instances and conditions for those problems to circulate and become something else than individual. From cheerfulness to Bataille’s laughter, “everywhere the hypothesis of the self is beginning to crack.”⁴²⁵

⁴²² *Tiqqun* is the title of a journal the homonymous group published from 1999 to 2001. *Tiqqun* is also a Hebrew term which means reparation, restitution, redemption. The Invisible Committee comes from the experience of *Tiqqun*.

⁴²³ The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, Semiotext(2), 2009, p 5.

⁴²⁴ Agamben in *Liberation* 19/11/2008, “Terrorism or tragicomedy”, “The only possible conclusion to this shadowy affair is that those engaged in activism against the (in any case debatable) way social and economic problems are managed today are considered *ipso facto* as potential terrorists, when not even one act can justify this accusation. We must have the courage to say with clarity that today, numerous European countries (in particular France and Italy), have introduced laws and police measures that we would previously have judged barbaric and anti-democratic, and that these are no less extreme than those put into effect in Italy under fascism.”

⁴²⁵ The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, *op. cit.*, p 34.

This is the Invisible Committee's activism, to create disconnections between ourselves and our problems, to liberate our problems from ourselves, to let the inadaptability and fatigue that spoil the cheerfulness of ourselves emerge (in a collective bursts of laughter). "It's within the malfunction and short-circuits of the system that we find the elements of a response whose logic would be to abolish the problems themselves."⁴²⁶ For the Invisible Committee it is a matter of unleashing the (affective) violence that today's cheerful subjectivation suffocates. Activism is this text they write and circulate, as much as anything else they "actively" do and live, as, for instance, "to run the local grocery store" and try "to revive the cultural life of the village" of Tarnac.⁴²⁷ And here too there is no opposition between what is called theory and what is called practice.

I would like to use this book as an epilogue for the dissertation, as an example of what you can do and become with Agamben beyond Agamben:

"The function of 'classical politics' [party politics] is to neutralize political intensities".⁴²⁸

"Producing oneself is becoming the dominant occupation of a society where production has no longer an object: like a carpenter who's been evicted from his shop and in desperation sets about hammering and sawing himself."⁴²⁹

Over Christmas I open a Facebook account. I have hesitated for years, the idea makes me sick, but I need to understand how it works, and what it can possibly do to myself.

"The fragmented individual survives as a form thanks to the "spiritual" technologies of counselling [see 17 December]. Patriarchy survives by attributing to women all the worst attributes of men: wilfulness, self-control, insensitivity. A disintegrated society survives by propagating an epidemic of sociability and entertainment."⁴³⁰ Facebook is a tool to like people a little more, to perceive them as likeable, to feel a sense of dearness and fondness that has been disappearing, or would be difficult to sustain otherwise:

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81

⁴²⁷ Agamben in *Liberation* 19/11/2008.

⁴²⁸ The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, *op. cit.*, p 11

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, p 49

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 91-92

facebook as a tool for an affective management, as a flattening of affects and affections onto the modality of a homogenizing “sociability and entertainment”.

GET ORGANIZED⁴³¹

Here the text proposes a series of “doublings” of contemporary mechanisms. If Agamben with *The Coming Community* operates a doubling of contemporary conditions, here doublings, in addition to being performed, are proposed as actions, they double a mechanism more than a condition. “*Get organized for no longer having to work.*” “*Plunder, cultivate, fabricate.*” “*Training and learning.*” “*Create territories. Multiply zones of opacity.*” “*Travel. Open our own lines of communication.*” “*Remove all obstacles, one by one.*” “*Flee visibility. Turn anonymity into an offensive position.*” “*Organize self-defence.*” The redemptive doubling of Agamben gets replaced by a doubling of “sabotage”, the tiny displacement works as a non-spectacular interruption of the smoothness of “management” in all its forms. *The Coming Insurrection* is a manual that teaches how to manage otherwise, how to organize through sabotage.

This is to problematize my observation above of the exclusivity of an armed struggle: “Because of the distance that separates us from them, weapons have taken on a kind of double character of fascination and disgust that can be overcome only by handling them. An authentic pacifism cannot mean refusing weapons, but only refusing to use them. Pacifism without being able to fire a shot is nothing but the theoretical formulation of impotence. Such a priori pacifism is a kind of preventive disarmament, a pure police operation. In reality, the question of pacifism is serious only for those who have the ability to open fire.”⁴³² Here the Committee takes up again Agamben’s notion of potentiality, from the writer who is able to write something but holds his hand half a way, to the writer that is able to throw a Molotov but “prefers not to”. “A massive crowd would be needed to challenge the army, invading its ranks and fraternizing with its soldiers. [...] An insurrection triumphs as a political force. It is not impossible to defeat an army politically.”⁴³³ We can choose to be pacifists as warriors, not as people subjected to violence. We can “prefer not to” use violence only if we can use it and if, the Committee adds, we can skilfully use it. This might be seen as a theatrical (non-)use of violence, as its rehearsal. We use “weapons” to sabotage the lines of a high speed

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, pp 103-116

⁴³² *Ibid.*, p 129

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, p 130

train (TAV), but was it really us? The possibility that we use violence, this imminent risk, would intensify our struggle, as in a coitus that does not turn into a discharge. Although Bartleby's lesson seems to differ: it is a becoming ungraspable (this might be the sense of the Committee's anonymity, invisibility).

The Coming Insurrection is about politics as getting together, not necessarily with the aim of deciding something, but as moments of "collective crystallization" in the form of a decision as something that takes hold of us: "the democratic character of decision making' is only a problem for the fanatics of process. It's not a matter of critiquing assemblies or abandoning them, but of liberating the speech, gestures, and interplay of beings that take place within them. We just have to see that each person comes to an assembly not with a point of view or a motion, but with desires, attachments, capacities, forces, sadness and a certain disposition towards others, an openness."⁴³⁴

This book, as many others, enters in composition with everything else, so that with the first pages of the diary, these first days back in Italy, I am getting the sense of something like a pressure in my throat. I'm in transit, but to settle at home, even if just for a few weeks, will entail a certain surrendering to the cheerfulness of a Christmas in Bolzano. This email I send will help us, me and my friends, to pierce this sweetly suffocating cheerfulness.

15 December

I got a phone call from Michi, she talks nonstop for half an hour, frantically, she doesn't even ask me how I am, she talks about her job as a teacher in a kindergarten. She has a qualification and she has been teaching for a long time, but this year she didn't get an annual substitution as she usually does, she keeps getting temporary jobs, three days here, a week there, everywhere in South Tyrol. She gets a phone call in the morning, she has to take the first bus available, if she says no she gets crossed out from the list, losing the already precarious possibility of work. She is a single mother and has a six years old child, the other week she was with her at the surgery when she gets a phone call from the employment office. "I'm with the paediatrician and my child..." she replies. "I'm sorry, if you don't take the substitution we'll have to delete you from the list." "Delete me then, I'm fed up with this!" And she hangs up. The day after she gets another phone call: "We haven't taken you out yet, we'll give you another chance, today you'll have to

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 122-3

work in Campo Tures.” She has been working like this since September and she hasn’t been paid yet, not a single euro, she has been asking money to her parents. She is exhausted. She knows she can rest now because they never call anyone right before Christmas, otherwise they would have to pay Christmas holidays as well. She says that there are so many others in the same situation, so many qualified and experienced teachers that have to work as “collaborators,” being paid half a salary. “You should do something Michi, you should do something together, get together, all of you, that’s crazy...” but she is not listening, she keeps talking obsessively into the phone.

16 December

As always at this time of year I call Piera, Giovanni’s mother, to arrange a visit. This time Giovanni answers himself, he is in Bolzano by chance, to study on a three day course on bioarchitecture. We go out together in the evening, we haven’t seen each other for years. We drink beer at the Picchio bar. We talk about “Italy”, I ask him if he knew about the killings of the police, and I also tell him about Michi’s job. He tells me stories of corruption and patronage that he experiences working as an architect. “What happened in Genoa was just the first sign that something had changed” says Giovanni. I speak in turn about the “us and them” that obsesses Italy today: “us” Italians, and “them,” the migrants invading our land. Even Giovanni seems to think in these “us and them” terms: “It’s like at the end of the Roman empire, we witness the decadence of our civilization and the barbaric invasions.” “Well, I think it’s a bit different, migrants are not conquerors, they come here and get exploited, even more harshly than everyone else. If there is a barbarian invasion today this is what Denys Arcand describes in his film, where the barbarians are not the migrants, but today’s army of young rampant and cynical managers and entrepreneurs.” At some point Giovanni, keen on tracing patterns of repetition throughout history, comes up with a description of a descent into fascism that strikes me with the straightforwardness of its formulation: “This is how it works, fear is induced in people, leaving them more and more isolated, they tend to lock themselves at home, watching TV, and they accept increasingly extreme levels of institutional and legislative violence as measures that are supposed to protect them.” I think it’s not just fear that produces this descent into fascism, affects and desire at large are implied. “It’s like going back to the ‘30s...” “Yes, but I imagine people in the ‘30s being more motivated, more passionately involved, whilst today everyone appears lobotomized, indifferent.” “There are many young people who are not indifferent.” “The teenagers I know are the most indifferent of all! They only think about keeping their

forelock in place.” We have the impression of being part of an operetta, a puppet theatre, Debord’s spectacular theatre, Agamben’s *commedia dell’arte*, Berlusconi’s soap opera. “Let’s create our own soap opera then.” (Summer Drafts)

17 December

For years now my mother has been making appointments for me to visit Marta, a homoeopathist in Verona. I have always refused to spend half a day and quite some money in order to visit a doctor, but now my stomach, liver, intestine and so on, hurt to a degree that makes me decide to go. My mother told me that Marta is also a sort of psychologist, and she is Catholic as well (that’s why my mother likes her so much). As a joke I told my friends in London that I was going to Italy to visit a *santona*, a sort of marabout. “How would you like to start the session?” asks Marta. “By telling you where it hurts.” I say. “Do you know what do I do, the way I work?” “Sure, you are an iridologist.” It’s just the first thing that comes to my mind. “Well, no, I’m a kinesiologist, I listen to your unconscious, to the energies of your body.” She taps her fingers on my wrists whilst uttering a series of not entirely audible terms. “Anger, anger... Three years old... Insecurity... You had a trauma when you were three years old, you experienced anger for the first time, and since then you never managed to come to terms with this force of anger, and this has been causing problems to your digestive system since.” She places boxes containing homeopathic remedies under my right arm and listens to my “unconscious” by tapping on my left wrist. This “unconscious”, this other self that I’m not aware of, chooses *Naja Tripudians* as a remedy, that is, cobra’s poison. I smile, thinking about witches and *santone*, and I’m proud of my alter ego who has chosen such a remedy for myself. “I tell you how we are constituted, this is not something you find in books, it’s what I came up with, after years of practice. There are five components: spirit, feelings, emotions, intellect and the body. For me it’s crucial to divide emotions from feelings. Feelings are more stable, emotions are something that happens to us and carry a potential for transformation. We tend to reject emotions, that is, we tend to avoid dealing with them, because it’s hard, and because emotions threaten the stability of ourselves.” I’m somehow surprised. To distinguish “emotions” from “feelings”, this sounds interesting. I might use different terms, but I try to find connections between what I’m dealing with and what she deals with in a different context. Thus, a question emerges: how to deal with emotions away from the therapeutic framework of the individual, that is, away from the need to obtain a “healthy self”, a healthy body for myself?

18 December

As a Christmas present I've asked my brothers to buy me one of Isabel's dolls. Isabel makes little dolls with a dough of maize flour. I've commissioned from her a portrait of our friend Teodora dressed in a South Tyrolean costume. Teodora comes from Ecuador and her skin is dark. When Maroni, a Lega Nord's politician, came to Bolzano, she "received" him dressed up with a traditional South Tyrolean costume with puffed sleeves and a red hearts motif, her breast pressed by a squared neckline, a basket full of velvet hearts saying "everyone is illegal". I meet Isabel in a bar run by a Brazilian girl and decorated by an impressive range of dolls. Isabel has the ability of laughing and talking at the same time, even when what she speaks of is not at all laughable in itself. This laughter is contagious, also because, although she has been living in Bolzano for decades, she keeps using Spanish words when she speaks (*osea* is her favourite). She does this even in public speeches. She runs a cultural association called *Latinoamerica y su gente*, together with her husband. She often states that her exuberance is part of her Latinamerican heritage, to great annoyance of some of her Latinamerican friends who don't perceive themselves as exuberant at all. At some point during the conversation she stops laughing and tells me about another association of migrants in South Tyrol: "The police broke into the association's office and confiscated all the papers. They also searched the coordinator's dwelling and took away his copies of the Koran." "Why would they do that? That's nonsense! Is the Koran forbidden in Italy? Or are the police supposed to decide what we should read, are they going to take care of our bookshelves?" "He is desperate, he doesn't know what to do, and I don't know what to do either..."

20 December

Together with my friend Ale I pay a visit to Buba, she looks in good shape, she is excited because she has just been promoted, and she will have an office all by herself. She tells us that this is thanks to EFT, Emotional Freedom Techniques, a form of meditation she has been practicing for a few months now. You have to think intensely about what you want to achieve whilst tapping your fingers all over your face and alongside the meridians of your body. The first thing you should achieve is the removal of blockages derived from traumas. The immediate results from EFT techniques for Buba were improved sight and an overcoming of her fear of speaking in German. Ale complains that EFT did not work at all for her. "You have to be patient and spend time

practicing” says Buba. I feel jealous, I wish I could solve my intestine problems like this. Then I think: if Buba got her promotion through EFT meditation, someone else didn’t get it instead. “You can learn EFT to improve someone else’s conditions as well. I haven’t tried yet, I don’t think it would work as well as it does with yourself.” OK, so you could help others with this EFT, but in any case it’s me, me, me, or, if I got enough for myself, it’s you, you, you.

24-25 December

There are two traditions for me attached to the 24th of December, one is to get drunk in the afternoon, the other is to go drunk to Vilma’s Christmas dinner. The two traditions started many years ago at the same time, and one cannot be without the other. Going around bars with friends, starting after lunch, it’s something I have done since I was a teenager: to start drinking at 2pm and maintain a decent level of intoxication for twelve hours. Since those times, the accomplices for this drinking custom have become fewer and fewer, people get sometimes lazy, sometimes caught up into less sociable Christmas habits, sometimes indifferent to good old traditions. I would prefer to go from bar to bar as we used to do, to get the chance of seeing different people, but now we spend the whole afternoon at Picchio. In the central hours of the afternoon the bar is almost empty, I have never seen it that empty on the 24th. After 5pm it gets more animated. There are young people too, teenagers. I don’t know any of them, I would like to know how young boys and girls get attracted by a place attended by older people, who started coming here when they were teenagers themselves: what is appealing about Picchio for them, how different people and different groups get to know each other. Franci’s boyfriend chats with young boys and girls, including us in the “conversation”, if something like a sequence of absurd jokes can be called as such. It’s Christmas and that’s easier to do. He plays the cards of attraction, not attraction of others towards him, but the other way round: I talk to you because I like your face, the way you wear your jumper or drink your beer, and I don’t bother to hide that I could possibly enjoy putting my hands under your jumper, sticking my tongue into your ear, getting my fingers smeared with your bodily fluids... But at the same time that’s not really the point, it’s not at all my aim, it’s not what I’m working towards. And still, I play together with you, and together with us, and all this glimmering, this intoxication, so that we break the perimeters of ourselves, of my group, stroking each other. We become able to stroke each other in such a way, despite ourselves and our blockages, despite my fears, the

protections of myself that I have been reinstating to such an extent that this is believed to be my character.

In a quieter moment at Picchio I talk with Ale about Buba and her EFT. “I was thinking how all these kinds of techniques are aimed at the individual’s benefit, even when this might cause a disadvantage for the others.” Ale talks about “civic sense”, and how this has disappeared today, about “individualism” and how everyone thinks about his or her own profit in an almost compulsive way: “In the laboratory where I work the girl who deals with the patients often has to work by herself because of a shortage of staff, and patients have to wait longer. It’s horrible to see how angry some of them get, shouting at her because they are kept waiting for their test results. They are just incapable to put themselves in her shoes, so that, on top of being exploited, she is also insulted by the patients. And the patients are often old retired people that have nothing much to do all day.” “I wish EFT could help us going beyond ourselves and our groups.” “Something like a training to make ourselves stronger and more skilful warriors...”

Picchio is closed now and I’m left alone with Molli. “Let’s go to Nadamas, we went together last year, remember, just before dinner for the last glass. We had such a great time, they closed the door and opened a spumante and it was just them, the waiters, and us, drinking together.” “I don’t know what are you talking about my dear, I don’t remember any of this, and my brother is coming now to pick me up, Happy Christmas!” I’m left to myself and it’s raining. “It’s raining the 24th of December in Bolzano! It has never happened as long as I have lived!” I talk to myself, staggering a bit, whilst walking towards Simona’s home. “At least I have another place to go before dinner, I will have another glass there.” I carry on talking, to keep myself company. And here I am, at Simona’s parents place, with Simona’s little nephews and their parents. They put a glass of prosecco in my hand, my head spins already, I just have to smile. I don’t pay much attention to the adults’ conversation, I talk with the four year old nephew, I find him the most likeable of the family, at least today, and it’s the first time I see him anyway. We talk about a song he likes very much, from the soundtrack of *L’armata Brancaleone*. Suddenly the adults’ conversation becomes very loud. They talk about “Rumanians”. Simona’s brother is shouting now, his face is all red: “Bastards, they are all bastards, especially that whore who married Gianni to get advantage of him, and then dumped him after she got what she wanted.” “Yes”, says the wife, “they are the worst race of all.” (the wife comes from Afghanistan). “But it’s not only the Rumanians, think

about all the Italian old men cheated by their caretakers. It's dangerous!" adds Simona's father, probably concerned about his own pension and properties. Suddenly I feel sick, I think I have too much alcohol in my body: "Simona, I think I should go now..." I think Simona's mother tries to cheer me up saying: "This is not about Rumanian women, it's about how stupid men are!" and laughs. "Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas, I have to go." Before I leave I get a few more comments on the weather and the climate change. "I don't believe about this climate change" says Simona's father: "Yes, it's raining at Christmas and so what, it happened already once thirty years ago, I remember it, there is nothing wrong with this climate!" "Sure, sure, I should really go now." I wish I could react to this crap instead of smiling and going away. I hope I will soon become skilful enough to do that. "Be gentle with the English girls!" says the father as he usually does with me. "Sure, no worries there."

This year I'm the only one who arrives drunk to Vilma's dinner. I have been going to Vilma's dinner for almost twenty years now. When Nilde, Vilma's mother and my friend Saveria's grandmother, died, Vilma invited me for Christmas to avoid having her empty chair at the table. I liked Nilde and she liked me, and I liked the idea of sitting on her chair. Throughout the years Vilma has expanded the invitations to Saveria's boyfriend and to other friends. Some people have been coming and going, this year there is eight of us. After dinner Saveria starts talking to me about migrants in Bolzano. Not really a Christmas topic, not for this kind of dinner, the conversation stays among the two of us. Saveria takes up the topic because a month ago Simona sent by email to her friends a letter written by the Australian Prime Minister inviting the Muslims to go back to their countries. As a heading Simona added, "This is a country which dares!" Some of us were surprised by Simona sending us this email, and with this Lega Nord kind of title. I sent an email back to everybody, questioning the "us" the Prime Minister keeps repeating in the letter: "our land", "our tradition", "our culture", "our lifestyle"... as a reply Simona told me that she sent this email for everybody to make their own reflections by themselves, not to generate a discussion. Thank you for that. Buba is one of the few who replied to my email. She tells us how she feels disrespected when "they" shout at her "whore!" because she is wearing shorts, when "they" leave the rubbish on the stairway and the whole block of flat stinks and gets invaded by cockroaches, when children at the kindergarten are not learning Christmas' songs anymore, so that "others" don't get offended. I didn't reply to this email, I didn't know how to do this. Saveria didn't take part in this email exchange, she feels like talking about this now. "We

helped our Russian cleaning lady a lot with her papers” she says. “She is a very good person.” This is something Buba was keen to stress as well, how affable she tries to be with migrants. Once again the logic is that of “us and them”, and also, that of “me and the other”, of myself being charitable to the disadvantaged other, a logic of Christian charity that too often reinstates a hierarchical fixity of roles. She carries on: “I think the problem are the male migrants, not the women. I hate when they ask for money in the street, they should get a job!” Shit, I think, she must be drunk as well to talk in such a way, or maybe it is just that this kind of talking and feeling has now become so common in Italy that it is difficult for people not to regurgitate it again. “But Saveria, where should an illegal migrant get a job? Now it’s already difficult for someone who has born here.” And to ask for money at the Saturday market is better than get exploited even more than an Italian with a “proper” contract, which is not really proper anyway. You break your neck and you are left to die, you have no papers, you don’t exist, that’s the perfect worker, one extracts the most out of this with minimum expense. I feel a coward to write this down, I should learn to reply to my friends straight away, rather than waiting to write a diary. But I’m too slow, my brain works too slowly, and I write this dissertation in the hope of making it stronger, so that one day soon I’ll be able to talk with my friends and everybody else in a different way. And I’ll be able to shift a conversation from brands of nappies to micropolitics.

We end up talking about Berlusconi. I tell Saveria about Berlusconi’s soap opera, about the continuity between the soap operas he has been broadcasting from the late ‘70s and the soap opera he has been performing as a protagonist of Italian Politics. “No, I don’t think it’s like this”, says Saveria, “I think many people vote Berlusconi very rationally just because he protects their interests.” I can’t believe this. Saveria is talking about herself, I’m sure! She has been voting Berlusconi, I cannot believe it. I knew about Simona, she has been voting AN for as long as I can remember, but to hear this from Saveria, it’s a stab in the neck! Maybe I should be glad she felt comfortable enough with me to make me imagine this. But it’s also scary that she feels fine to talk like this, she does not realize this abomination! I will prepare my weapons patiently. She carries on: “And maybe those same people [you mean yourself!] will vote Fini next time, because Berlusconi is not really protecting their interests anymore as he used to do.” I look at Ale, she is here as well, and I think of her previous words on individualism and lack of civic sense. “But would you go for Berlusconi and Fini even if their ways of protecting your interests as an entrepreneur would fuck up everything else? Because like

this, in some other way you'll get fucked up as well!" No answer to this, the conversation shifts, going back to the beginning of this diary, to Berlusconi and the little souvenir of Milan's cathedral. Saveria again: "You know, my father called me when this happened and his voice was trembling, he got very emotional, he was so worried for him. My mother told me that he even cried..." In such a way that he never did whilst watching a soap opera. Merry Christmas.

Postscript. When I first wrote this diary I could never have imagined that this was going to be the last Christmas dinner with Vilma and Saveria. After 20 years they decided to stop this tradition. It's too much work, too much a hassle, and now Saveria has a second baby to take care of.

APPENDIX 7: A crab in the brain

"Con la psicanalisi ti puoi conoscere..."

E io non mi voglio conoscere, io mi voglio svegliare ogni giorno non sapendo chi sono, montare su una barca a vela e andare verso l'orizzonte." Lucio Fulci

Berlusconi's soap opera enchants the Italians with the adventures of their "papi", this "father" of the Italians who shines like a Hollywood star, who arouse people's passion as JR in *Dallas* (apparently the actor Larry Hagman got repeatedly assaulted in the street by outraged viewers). But it is probably Lega Nord's soap opera that the cinema of Lucio Fulci counters more effectively. With Berlusconi there is a projection of desire always frustrated, and therefore always generated anew: for men it might be something like – I wish I could be that rich, that powerful, that impudent, that criminal and always untouched, immortal and ever young thanks to plastic surgery, I wish I could be that boorish and ignorant and yet so successful, and with plenty of beautiful girls around, like a real Latin lover, and so on; for women it might be – I wish I could have a husband like that, or I wish I could be a velina. With Lega Nord we have a different kind of aborted desire, a territorial desire: I have to protect my identity, my family, my land, from the impurity of the other. I have to keep my territory clean, I have to defend my traditions, I have to recuperate the purity that has been corrupted, and so on. Lucio Fulci counters this soap opera by breaking down the linearity of its narrative and the consistency of its characters through a bubbling of our bodies, a putrefaction

which is a proliferation of molecular movements of the body: the other is not the foreigner coming from another land, it is a micro-other multiplying on the “proper” body itself and transforming its shape. The fascist fear of contamination (the zombies invading our land) becomes an indefinable affective force: fear is corroded by laughter, intertwined with erotic excitement, contaminated by abjection and absurdity.

A film like *A Cat in the Brain* by Lucio Fulci doubles fear, fear as constructed by the media and by crime TV programs like *La vita in diretta* (“Life broadcasted live”), and *Chi l’ha visto?* (“Who has seen him?”), that with titles like *La decapitata di Castel Gandolfo* (“The headless woman of Castel Gandolfo”) seem to emulate the “infamous” Italian B series horror cinema (*Un gatto nel cervello* was probably cheaper to make than any episode of *Chi l’ha visto*). “Horror” is not, in Fulci, an affection reducible to fear alone, it implies a clash of incompatible emotions: fear, joy, eroticism, disgust... which kind of human emotion am I supposed to experience? “Horror” is the label of this cinema, it is not the name of this production of forces. The viewer / participant of this “horrifying” cinema gets cracked up, together with the narrative and its characters, always on the verge of their collapse, their disintegration into a nonsensical chaos. Not only is it impossible to conceive a clean and pure self for myself, my family and my land, it is impossible to compose their unity and coherence: what am I supposed to feel?

A Cat in the Brain (1990) is a late film by Fulci, where the filmmaker acts as the protagonist in the role of himself, that is, as a horror filmmaker. Fulci shoots some scenes anew, but also incorporates parts of his recent *Quando Alice rompe lo specchio* and *Il fantasma di Sodoma* (both filmed in 1988), as well as shots of other films he produced (amongst others, Mario Bianchi’s *Non aver paura della zia Marta*). The film is a sort of patchwork, the different scenes are held together by a narrative at the limit of the absurd, the impression is to watch something which is always about to crumble into nonsense – but it doesn’t. To make use of previous films is primarily a strategy to keep the budget extra low, but, as often with Fulci, an expedient suggested by necessity becomes something else.

Whilst the opening credits run, Fulci, sitting at the desk in his house, makes a list of different ways of murdering people. It is his psychoanalyst who, towards the end of the film, asks Fulci to write this list, but the scene appears at the beginning of the film. It follows an image of a stuffed cat scratching cerebral matter, the cat in the brain of the

title. The cat is clearly stuffed, its movements are stiff, but there is something ridiculously disquieting in this scene where the fakeness of this cinema is so apparent. The film begins in Cinecitta where Fulci is shooting *Quando Alice rompe lo specchio*. This is Cinecitta' in the early 1990s, but it looks rather dreary and desolate, as if it has been deserted for decades. We see a scene of *Quando Alice rompe lo specchio* where the protagonist eats a big steak of meat taken from the leg of a lady he has just killed. During lunch break Fulci goes to a restaurant, behind him a nun and a priest are eating together, Fulci is offered a huge tartar steak and starts feeling sick just by looking at it. He sees again the killer of the film sawing the woman with a chainsaw (another scene of the same movie). The images are repulsive, Fulci is disgusted, despite being quite evident that we are looking at a plastic mannequin filled by red stuff. Fulci, looking at the raw meat, betrays a dumb expression that makes him look quite ridiculously pathetic. His face is dead-pan. The situation itself is ridiculous, a dish with tons of minced meat, a nun eating behind it, shots from another film, the giggling face of the killer mincing the meat of his victim, his stupid expression, he puts the remains of the victim's body in a bucket and throws them to the pigs. There is something not just repellent but also offensive about this gesture, to throw the body of a woman in a pigsty, and everything has such an everyday and cheap appearance, cheaper than in a soap opera, where everything is filtered by a flattening and unifying filter of kitsch.

Fulci goes home, his house is in a village: on the way home he starts having hallucinations, he sees the neighbour, cutting wood with a chain-saw, covered in blood. As with Cinecitta', Fulci's house and the entire village look a bit rundown, as if coming from previous decades. Not far away from his own, Fulci sees the house of a psychoanalyst and decides to get an appointment. The secretary looks like she is coming out of a cheap porn movie from the early 1980s. She is excited because Fulci is a well known filmmaker and whilst telling this to her friend over the phone she keeps winking in that stereotyped way often used in badly acted erotic films. The psychoanalyst is in his office watching, accidentally, scenes of *Quando Alice rompe lo specchio* on his TV monitor. Those other scenes, isolated from their context, appear even more absurd: a soprano singer slaps the face of a man and gets violently slapped whilst singing. Fulci tells the doctor about his hallucinations, and the psychoanalyst explains how the boundary between reality and cinema has become unstable for the filmmaker. A convincing diagnosis, but the psychoanalyst is also a psychopath who hypnotizes Fulci to make him believe that the murders the doctor will go on to commit have in fact been

perpetrated by Fulci himself. We understand the plot straight away, from the beginning of the film, there is nothing hidden we need to uncover, like in the Italian tradition of gialli and horrors, from Mario Bava to Dario Argento. And there is nothing psychological about this film, there are no children's traumas revealed at the end, to explain everything and justify the killer's pathology, as so often happens in Italian horrors. Fulci leaves the doctor's office without paying much attention to the secretary who, feeling hurt by this indifference, utters a sonorous "Asshole!" after Fulci leaves.

Fulci is back in Cinecittà and meets one of his actors in the corridor. He explains to him that the film they are going to shoot is about Nazism and sadism, about the horror of Nazism, about depravation, and asks "Do you get it?" – "Well, not really", is the actor's reply. Everyone seems a bit dumb here, and all the dialogues sound stereotyped, if not ludicrous. Fulci today directs a different film, *Il fantasma di Sodoma*, and we hear his commentaries whilst shooting, his voice over guiding the actors, but what we see is not the shooting of the film, but the film itself. Fulci's voice over is uncanny, it seems affected by the vision of the film, his voice pants, obsessed by what we see. The young boy, the actor Fulci met in the corridor before, is dressed with a Nazi uniform, and appears as a ghost before a naked sleeping girl who wakes up and is right away attracted by him. The boy says: "I'm going to harm you, and you will like it", and slaps her face repeatedly until blood drops from her mouth. The drops of blood become litres when the boy starts to smear them on her naked body.

Fulci says: "Nazis, sadism, but what's the sense of all this?" The shooting goes on, the same boy is now filming a Nazi orgy. Now Fulci is looking at his own film, looking at the boy that looks through the camera. With his voiceover Fulci describes the scene, inciting the improvised filmmaker. Fulci keeps repeating words like "cruelty, sex, degeneration", and "you like pain, torture excites you" addressing the boy and everyone else, and possibly also himself. The absurdity is that there is nothing like cruelty, pain and torture here, we don't see any of this, the scenes are ludicrous, even more so because of Fulci's repetitive commentary: the boys are completely dressed, the girls are topless, and giggling, Fulci talks of "degenerated sex", but there is no sex at all here, there is just a couple pretending to shag on a sofa, a bit too clumsily; a boy pours some spumante on the breast of a girl lying on the floor, but instead of getting excited she starts shivering for the cold; a couple plays "erotic" games with food, "everything you want you can do it" says Fulci, and a man throws a cracker into the mouth of a girl, and

squeezes a lemon on her belly... The music seems taken from a traditional German tavern, and it sounds silly and disquieting at the same time. Finally “the most exciting scene of all” arrives, a girl sprawled across a billiard table, someone shoots a ball between her legs... That’s it.

And yet there is something disturbing in this scene, maybe because of the incoherence between what we see and what we hear. The whole film is broken down, out of synch with itself. It is supposed to be a horror film, and it is horrifying, but not just that.

“Scenes of torture and depravation, this is what the public wants, and you too.” But this film gives to “the public” something else. Fulci’s horror cinema goes off the tracks of cinema and off the tracks of (Italian) life, after the most intensive decade of Berlusconiization of the country, the glorious ‘80s of the triumph of Mediaset.

Fulci gets too wound up by the filming process, he goes crazy, as if he had a cat in the brain. “It’s as if there’s a crab in my head. A crab, a toad, some horror I have to puke up, no matter what.”⁴³⁵ After the scene of the orgy, Fulci meets two German journalists who want to interview him about his working method: an attractive lady and a young man. The room is set up in a way that it looks like a cinematographic set, and Fulci suddenly sees the man wearing a Nazi uniform, the images of the Nazi movie come back. Fulci is now in the corridor with his manager who says: “Lucio, what have you done, you have to apologize to them now!” “What have I done? I had a nightmare, a horrible scene...”, the scene of the billiard table. “You have beaten the journalist and torn up the lady’s clothes!” Fulci, embarrassed, goes to the journalists to apologize, and the lady, tidying up her clothes, says with a post-coital tone: “Lucio, you have been wonderful, I’ve never felt an emotion like that in my entire life...”.

The psycho-psychoanalyst starts killing people, and Fulci sees everything, it is not clear how: it seems that the doctor follows Fulci and then kills someone in front of him. Some murder scenes are probably taken from other films and re-edited here. Fulci acts as a sort of mad double of the mad doctor, he experiences everything as if he is killing himself. When Fulci is not on screen, the viewer of the film coincides with Fulci, it is us / he experiencing what happens, so that through Fulci there is a channel to connect us with everything else. The psycho wears a jacket with a ludicrous hood, the way he grins is hateful and disgusting. He gets closer to a prostitute, she is in daylight and he is in

⁴³⁵ Bataille, *The Culprit*, op. cit., p 15.

dusk, shot and reverse shot: this might be a nuit americaine, or two different films, or two different shots at a different time of the day. With a pocket knife the psycho cuts her hand and then decapitates her with one single gesture, and the plastic head rolls down the hill.

It is night now and Fulci sees something else, a girl with a face distorted by terror in front of a fire; the wind blows, she tries to reach the hands of two out-of-frame monsters beside her but she gets burned. It is not clear whether this is a Sabbath, or an attempt of it. She runs away, she sees more monsters appearing, actors dressed in cheap carnival plastic masks... but again there is something unsettling in the scene, it might be the wind, the strange features of the girl, her twisted expression, her suffocated cry, the sound of the fire... she falls down into the fire, and "Stop!" Fulci is deranged, this is the set of one of his films, and he is late: "Sorry Lucio, we have been waiting some time for you, but...". This is far away from Hollywood and its cinema of emotions and psychological identification; it is closer to Godard, when the filmmaker pierces and exposes the game that makes us believe in the naturalness of cinema, by showing a camera here, a microphone there. Fulci shows us stuffed cats and plastic rolling heads, he is not trying to master and manipulate the viewers' psyche (as the psycho – psychiatrist does), immersing us in a sort of illusionary dream presented as if it was detached from reality: Fulci gives us the possibility of stepping back all the time, we see all this is fake, but because we are aware of this, the affection becomes more bodily than psychological.

Back in his village Fulci meets a young, sympathetic girl in a wheelchair who asks for his help in order to go down the stairs of a bridge. The lovable face of the girl turns suddenly into a putrefied head, and we, us and Lucio, are transported somewhere else, to a rotting body in a wheelchair running down some (other) stairs. There is not really a correspondence between the wheelchair on the bridge and the other wheelchair on the staircase. The passage is fast and it is not easy to perceive. Fulci, terrified, runs away and locks himself into his house provoking the sweet little girl's disappointment. He is scared, he hears noises outside the locked window: suddenly the same wheelchair with the putrid body smashes through the window, enters a house (Lucio's house?), hits a man and cuts his throat with a wheel. Despite this dreadful nightmare unfolding, poor Lucio is hungry and puts a dish in the oven to warm it up, but instead of the dish he sees in the oven a "human" head (a wax head) slowly melting down. He is shocked, he needs

something to drink, but he drops the whiskey bottle, and on the floor, instead of shards, we see the body of a man rapidly putrefying, cracking, squeezing, liquid erupts from numerous sores, the chest opens and a black mass of rotten viscera pours out slowly. Fulci goes towards the window to get some air, and his mood suddenly changes, his good looking neighbour is undressing by the window, she smiles at him, she strips for him, Fulci smiles as well, with a greedy and foolish look. But suddenly the husband comes, gets angry at her and closes the curtains. Suddenly Fulci sees a girl stabbing a boy by a window that may or may not resemble the previous one.

Bataille talks of devastation, of putrefaction: it is the ferment of putrefaction of the ancient man that sets in motion the transformation of the contemporary man, his body lacerated through communication. As Bataille says, the “ancient man” is not a return to the past, it is the movement of a putrefaction that unsettles the teleology of progress, the linearity of a chronology, the position of the individual in this linearity, and the presentness of a dominant form of life. Nietzsche/Bataille deals with the putrefying things of the “past” (God, religion, mythology, theatre, sacrifice, mysticism), and with putrefying bodies, his own wounded body proliferating with the life of a multitude of “foreign” microorganisms, resisting the stratification of the “present” through the movement of an eternal return, making yourself a body that becomes an “ocean”, a “desert”, a “multitude” (from the swarming of Lucio Fulci’s body to that of an ocean/desert).

In both Nietzsche and Bataille there is a transformation of a body that, through its lacerations, through laughter and tears, multiplies itself in all sorts of possibilities, in “all the names of history”, in the possible return of Nietzsche, Bataille, Walser, Debord... in all the different roles of a tragicomedy. Bataille becomes the name of Nietzsche, of a filthy prostitute, an activist, a perverted priest, an archangel, a flower, a flame. But the return, the double, the multiplication, does not follow a sequential order, so that we never have a coherent role at any one time, but rather a becoming, always a different state, on account of which I become ocean, I become desert, I become multitude. The eternal return is the temporality of “community”, a temporality of heterogeneity, always different from itself, it is the untimeliness of an ocean, of a desert, imperceptible variations and the return of everything in the form of a possibility. Bataille’s community never becomes a stable community, either now or at some other

time: it is always subject to rupture, breakage, disruption, that is, an unforeseeable variation of intensities that never ends into a final work.

The psycho doctor commits his next murder, he kills a prostitute in a car with an old man in the countryside, at night. Before the murder there is an almost pornographic scene: the old man licks the prostitute's breast, she moans erotically, he sticks his hand between her legs, whilst the psycho gets near, and Fulci, who seems to be there by chance, tries to light a cigarette. When he sees the knife he drops the lighter. The next day (but the turning of day and night seems to be arbitrary in this film) he realizes his lighter is missing and goes back to find it. On the way to the countryside he sees a strange man who looks somehow in between a Hare Krishna and a beggar. Fulci runs after him with his car, he crushes into him, and starts driving back and forth smashing his head and chest on the ground. Fulci has become a killer himself! But no, it was only a big tin he was smashing, it is yet another hallucination that both he and we have undergone. The fascist-racist regurgitation of Lucio, *italiano medio*, exterminating the dirty migrant / vagabond "other" gets materialized, expressed and undone. Fulci is now exasperated, he goes back home and calls Gabriele, his detective friend, but Gabriele is on holiday, so Fulci calls the psychologist again, asking for help. Fulci is on the verge of a complete breakup, not only himself in the film, but the film itself is pushed to the brink of madness, dissolution, the collapse of the recognisability of its characters, its very structure: the different images and scenes barely hold together.

The doctor is watching more films made by Fulci. The opera singer sings even whilst asleep, his lover cannot stand her anymore, he takes a whip and strangles her. The doctor pauses the video, a shaky and gruesome freeze-frame of the lady screaming. The psychoanalyst talks by himself about "that stupid theory of violence on screen that produces real violence". But right after he confirms the theory: inspired by Fulci's film, he strangles with a wire the sexy wife languidly eating chocolates in the bedroom next door.

In a two minute extract of an interview available on youtube, Fulci discusses psychoanalysis: "I hate psychologists. Sigismondo [sic] Freud took the idea of confession from the Catholics, and instead of having it collective he made it individual. Scoundrels! As with the Foligno monster: the psychologist arrives, the first question is 'What are your favourite films?'" When he was seven he used to sneak into cinemas to

see Dario's [Argento] and my films. The psychologist raises his hands as to say – it's all clear now! And then it turns out that he was not the Foligno monster." We can read *A Cat in the Brain* as Fulci's critique of psychoanalysis, or at least as an expression of hatred for it. Only here, with the psychoanalyst, the theory that film violence produces real violence comes true. Violence on film affects the viewers in different ways, only a psychoanalyst with his reductionist approach to the psyche could believe (and could be subjected to, as in this film) visual identification: I see the killer on screen, I do it myself. The effect that "visual violence" has on Fulci is different, it does not incite violence (killing), it transforms the perception of the world, the perception of human bodies, which become less human, lose their shape, their consistency, opening up and secreting all sorts of liquids. All this takes place at the level of sensing and perception. The killings Fulci actually sees are the doctors' murders, everything else is bodily alteration. This changed perception of the human body in Fulci flows into a sort of eroticism. These affective transformations can be seen as a doubling of (Italian) everyday life, shaped by TV and its stereotypes regulating roles, relations, desires (the macho Latin Lover and the complacent and available girl, but also the dirty migrant / vagabond).

After seeing the doctor Fulci goes to Gabriele's house (but he was supposed to be on holiday!) and here, instead of Gabriele finds his wife and two children, who are all immediately slaughtered in front of Fulci. The scenes are taken from a film by Mario Bianchi produced by Fulci, you can tell the different quality of the photography, but this difference functions as the oneiric aspect of Fulci's visions in the house. The scenes acquire more impact here than in the original film, Fulci dialogues with them, he goes into the bathroom, sees a naked girl taking a shower and says: "Sorry, I thought it was Gabriele...", the girl does not pay attention to him (of course, Fulci was not supposed to be in the same film), she draws the curtain, and is then repeatedly stabbed, like in a truculent version of *Psycho*. The brother is running with his tricycle in the living room, round after round, until a chainsaw cuts his head. The mother is looking for something in a trunk and gets decapitated, her neck smashed by its cover. Fulci, more and more unsettled, keeps looking for Gabriele, but he finds instead a rotting body in a bed, bustling with little white worms. Gabriele's gardener comes and kisses the putrid mouth. The middle class Italian family gets disfigured at the very level of body.

Fulci runs away and outside the house bumps into Gabriele, who is back from his holiday. Fulci tells the friend his story, and the detective says: “It has been a mistake to go to a psychoanalyst”. But after seeing the friend, Fulci’s delirium continues with more images of mutilated and rotting bodies. Several images previously seen come back, as they did throughout the whole film, again and again, until Fulci faints. He wakes up the day after in a field in the countryside. Next to him a cat is scraping the soil (is the cat finally out of his brain?) until the face of the doctor’s wife appears. Gabriele comes next to Lucio, smiling. Fulci says “it wasn’t me, I didn’t kill her!” “Don’t worry Lucio, I know that, the doctor did it, he just got killed in a shooting with the police.”

Final scene: Fulci is now fishing on a boat called *Perversion* together with the doctor’s secretary. It must be winter because he is heavily dressed, but the “attractive” secretary wears a swimming costume. “Can you take more baits, darling?” “Sure my dear.” She smiles “sensually” and goes below deck, winking. Fulci understands it as an invitation and goes below deck as well. The camera stays outside, what we see is the black square of the deck. We can hear the secretary pleasurably surprised, but soon you hear the sound of a chainsaw and the girl screaming. And then a voice says “Stop!” the shooting ends and the actors come out again.

Fulci’s bodies versus the Padanian bodies of Lega Nord, the Italian bodies of Casa Pound. The heroic male bodies hardened by fear (“I have it hard” is Bossi’s motto) start losing their steadiness. There is something base in Lega Nord (as Bossi’s motto tells), something low, something of the people which is a style, and becomes populism (and embodies racism, sexism and so on). In this sense Fulci’s cinema is a double of Lega Nord’s theatre of roughness: it pushes roughness towards decomposition. From a fascist fear of dirt and otherness, producing stiffening bodies, to the becoming other of bodies. Fulci’s cinema is sometimes populated by zombies, but these never become the symbol of something threatening humanity. Fulci’s zombie movies are never sociological, like George Romero’s (in *Dawn of the Dead* zombies are a product of capitalism: mall shoppers whose intelligence and sensitivity has receded completely, in the more recent *Land of the Dead* zombies are the outcasts of society and fight against the neoliberal rich). In Fulci zombies are never psychological either, he is not interested in showing, for instance, familiar human dramas of lovers and relatives becoming zombies, as zombie films often do. The zombie in Fulci becomes something else than a human other that has to be eliminated (the migrants for Lega Nord). Fulci says it clearly from the

beginning, in one of the first scenes of *Zombi 2*, his first zombie film, where the pretty Tisa Farrow (Mia's sister, who at the time was working in New York as a taxi driver) is rescued from a tiger shark by a swimming zombie. What matters with Fulci's zombies is the possibility for the human body to become something else: to rot and still be alive. It is a sort of celebration of the liveliness of rotting bodies.

Fulci offers the example of a methodology of grossness. Already Bataille operates along the lines of a certain B: an impostor philosopher, an impostor sociologist, an impostor mystic and so on. Fulci is a B series filmmaker whose cinema upsets all genres: not only horror films but also thrillers, erotic films, comedies, and even westerns, are always contaminated and pushed away from the canonical features of a genre. But there is something gross in this displacement, there is a becoming filthy also at level of the methodology, and a filthiness which is vulgar, cheap, disgusting. Vulgarity extends to this cinema's very construction, which repeatedly defies all professionalism; a lumpen cinema which finds in its grossness the possibility of creating affects, the possibility of doubling the stiff and limited grossness of Italian–Berlusconian life into a hyperbolic bursting forth of life continuously and actively confronting death.

APPENDIX 8: **Summer Drafts**

In 2008 the European itinerant biennial Manifesta comes to Bolzano, Trento, Rovereto, Fortezza. Some of my friends suggest that I should organize an exhibition, or get involved in Manifesta in some way. I'm not interested in curating an exhibition, and so, lying on my bed in London, I start thinking what I could do instead. I think about myself growing up in Bolzano, about my friends, my family, the mountains all around, I think of the ways in which Bolzano has been changing in the past few decades, and in the years when I was away.

Raqs Media Collective are in charge of curating the exhibition in Bolzano, they win the competition with a project on Alexander Langer, and right after they drop any reference to Langer, and to Bolzano as a city where, starting from the '20s, Italian and German speakers have been "living together" in a sort of segregation.⁴³⁶ The Italian term for this

⁴³⁶ Alexander Langer was a journalist, peace activist, politician, translator and teacher. Born in Sterzing in 1946, Alto Adige/Suedtiro, he became involved early on in local political issues, at the time centered on

living together is *convivenza*, a term used and abused and now often devoid of its meaning in the South Tyrolean context. Raqs Media Collective organize an exhibition in and on the steelwork factory of Bolzano, which for the occasion, and after many years of disuse, gets restored. Rumours say that, after Manifesta, the empty factory is going to become a huge shopping mall. The impression is that the city of Bolzano is left disconnected from the exhibition and from Manifesta. Few in Bolzano know what Manifesta is, despite the advertisement outside the train station. Even less go to see the exhibition, so that during the summer a case “explodes”, and Durnwalder, the President of the Provincial Council, has to intervene in defence of Manifesta, saying that the Region has to distinguish itself not only for its mountains and its Speck (a smoked ham produce in this region), but also for the production of contemporary art. Manifesta chooses a bordering region like Alto Adige, but, after the collapse of the project in Cyprus (the aborted Manifesta 6), decides to play safe, avoiding addressing the socio-political issues at stake in this territory. If Manifesta does not address the issues around “cohabitation” and living together that have characterized Bolzano for almost a century, I will do this myself, that’s my plan. If Raqs are not going to deal with Langer, I will do this myself together with my friends and family. This is going to be called Summer Drafts, a term naming the maximum load a ship can bear before sinking.⁴³⁷

In Bolzano everything is double, the public institutions are both “Italian” and “German”, all the public offices, schools, kindergartens, youth centres, even bars tend to be divided into “Italian” and “German”. The ID card is written in both languages, and is green instead of brown. This often causes the suspicion of European border officers, who might think I have forged a fake ID using the wrong colour by mistake. If you go to an Italian school you grow up as an Italian, with Italian friends, registered as Italian.

the interethnic relations in the region, which after two world wars and a few decades of tensions and terrorism were very tense. In the early 1970s he was active in Lotta Continua, a left-wing political organization in Italy. Later, he joined the Green Party in Bolzano and became member of the regional council for Trentino-Alto Adige in 1978. Resistant to the imposition of ethnic boundaries, he refused twice to declare his ethnic group during the 1981 and 1991 census in Bolzano. (This is a mandatory choice in that region, aimed to protect the ethnic *status quo*). This choice made him ineligible to run for local elections. During the 1980s he rose in the ranks of the Green Party, first at the national level, and then in Europe, eventually becoming Member of the European Parliament and president of the Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament in 1989. He later became deeply involved in peace initiatives in Europe and the Middle East, and in fostering the dialogue between the alternative Left parties, the Radicals, left-wing Christians and other pro-peace, environmentalist and fringe political groups at the European level. He served as representative of the European Parliament in Israel, Russia, Brazil, Argentina, Libya, Egypt, Cyprus, Malta, and was particularly involved campaigning for peace in former Yugoslavia, during the ethnic wars of the 1990s. Alexander Langer took his life in Florence on July 3, 1995.

⁴³⁷ www.summerdrafts.org

The spaces where the two “ethnic groups” have contact are very few. When I wrote the proposal for Summer Drafts, nearly all my friends in Bolzano were Italians, the few German speaking friends I had were gay, because the gay “community” is too small and not institutionalized enough to be divided, and it can function as a sort of relatively free “zone”.

In the last decade more and more migrants have chosen Bolzano as a place to live. They are channelled onto either the German or the Italian side, and more often the Italian, so that Italian schools and kindergarten are seeing an increasing number of students who don’t speak either Italian or German. The institutional double has been creaking more loudly recently: Italian parents try to send their children to German kindergartens, and politicians recently proposed to introduce an entrance examination for three year old non-German speaking students for them to be accepted in German kindergartens. I believe that people whose mother tongue is neither German nor Italian could open up possibilities for rethinking “convivenza” and lead to experiments in different ways of “living together”.

What I would like to do, in “parallel” with Manifesta, is to create situations for different people to meet, come together, do things together: people who, even in such a small town as Bolzano, would not get to know each other otherwise. If something like a homosexual desire could traverse the separation between Italians and Germans, the idea with Summer Drafts is to create situations where something like desire could be activated in such a way to produce transversal conjunctions. I invite some artists I personally know to build these situations together with people in Bolzano. Lungomare, an art space which is also one of the few cultural associations in Bolzano that does not work as part of one or the other side of Alto Adige / Sudtirolo, will host the project.

I invite several associations of Bolzano dealing with migrants to be involved in the project. Initially my idea for Summer Drafts is to use food as something that might easily cross cultural separations. As an Italian grown up in Bolzano I have no German friends but I cook and eat Knödeln every week. I imagine setting up a summer school where artists lead workshops and seminars, and a group of participants, Italians, Germans and migrants, do things together and discuss things together, using food as a medium. In this summer school food is going to be a material to be used together, rather than a topic for a project.

I contact the associations of Bolzano, and I have the impression no one really gets what I am trying to do with this topic / non-topic of food. Isabel told me recently: “I understood something of Summer Drafts only after it was over!” Before the summer I go to Bolzano to present the project to the Province of Bolzano and to the associations that agreed to participate, and also to get other people and associations involved. EURAC organizes a “Fair of Associations of Foreigners” (*sic*), and I spend three days there, talking with as many people as I can. “Ah, you are the one organizing the gastronomic project!” “Well, it’s not really a gastronomic project...” I start consider changing “topic”, there are so many “intercultural projects” dealing with food, where the “inter” consists in “locals” testing the exotic food of the “foreigners”.

The Fair is depressing, hidden in the basement of EURAC, no one knows about it, some associations withdrew because they were initially told they could sell and make a profit (after all this is supposed to be a fair), and at the last minute the authorization to sell was denied. To talk with Andreas about this issue makes me question the idea of “art and culture” as something pure, something that has to be protected by the ugly corruption of money. If there is nothing like a “pure” culture, nothing like a cultural event which is not entangled with economics and with everything else, let’s take over the economics of culture to do something with it. I also think about Mujeres Creando selling their publication on a stool of the Camdem Arts Center right after their performance.

The Fair opens with a presentation of the EURAC’s research team: after several years of research and many publications piled up in the storage of the building, the experts present now the result of their work – a map of South Tyrol with all the associations of “foreigners” singled out by a red dot. Fantastic tool for both social scientists and Carabinieri, see the Christmas Diary above: I met here at this fair the president of the association which later on got closed down by the police, he gave me some mint tea and he had a picture taken with me, which now is maybe in the anti-terrorist folder of a local police station. These are the three most terrible days for me: I’m completely alone, I don’t really know anyone, not even the people of Lungomare who at this stage seem somewhat unenthusiastic about the project. I feel like I’m selling a commodity, repeating the same words to people yawning at me. I’m terrified by the possibility that what I write and say is not understandable because I use something like a theoretical language translated into Italian. And I don’t quite know what I’m trying to propose

myself, because one thing at least is clear to me, what I have written in my bedroom in London is not to be *applied* in Bolzano, I talk here to people so that the proposal can change, for it to make sense and respond to the associations and the people of Bolzano. The proposal changes according to what happens, to the conversations I have, to the encounters with different people.

In such a way I meet Betty, I meet Valeria V. I have conversations with many people in Bolzano, and also with the artists invited. Some of them make clear from the beginning that it is crucial for them to be able to spend some time in Bolzano before coming up with an idea for the project. "I don't want to come to Bolzano with a nice idea and ask people to do something as if I would instruct them." Valeria G comes to Bolzano with me before the summer, I introduce her to people I have already met, Valeria V, Matthias, Olfa, and we meet new people together. We think and rethink the project together, every time we meet a new person, every time we have another conversation, we try to undo it and put it together again.

We also think about different funding bodies, about ways of presenting the project to them, I visit offices and make phone calls until the very end, a few days before the beginning of Summer Drafts, because we don't have enough money to pay for everything. At the Social and Cultural offices of Provincia and Comune di Bolzano the usual question is: "Yes, but what is the AIM of the project, what is the project going to ACHIEVE?" They want statistics, they want predictable and accountable outcomes. They don't ask other questions, they don't try to understand, they are not interested in thinking about this.

I undergo some friction with Valeria G: she keeps overturning everything all the time. Over the phone she is acting as my coach, she is encouraging me, as if I was a boxer and she was my confrontational trainer. At times, when I am together with Valeria G, it is as if she is pushing me against a wall, she sometimes freaks out herself, we both panic because we don't know exactly what to do, me as a coordinator, she as an artist. And to some extent we don't want to know, we want to leave all this open. Her impetus sometimes leaves me feeling suffocated, no air comes into my brain. Tomorrow morning I have a meeting at the Comune di Bolzano to present the project and right now Valeria is tearing down Summer Drafts into pieces. "Valeria, what the fuck am I going to tell them tomorrow? You are fucking up my brain" "Ok, Ok, let's take a break,

let's go out and have a beer.” In a horrible mood, we go to the nearest bar. We look up at the bar's luminous sign: “CAPOLINEA”, it says, that is, “TERMINUS”. We burst into laughter, it's the terminus, but just for today.

Someone else who provokes a series of commotions during the organization of the project is Angelika, who, together with Daniele, runs Lungomare. We are both working hard, Angelika and I, myself for Summer Drafts and her for the various projects Lungomare is promoting in parallel with Manifesta. For the opening of Summer Drafts, coinciding with that of Manifesta, we invite, through Valeria G, the anthropologist Franco La Cecla. Although there are many “interesting” people in Bolzano because of Manifesta (“interesting people” means here more or less internationally known people in the field of contemporary art and culture) it is difficult to find someone to come to animate the discussion. I have a rather animated argument with Angelika over the telephone regarding the possible guests we could have beside Franco. The day after we are supposed to go together to Radio Rai to present our respective projects, Summer Drafts and Place It, the latter an initiative that sees Lungomare invite “graphic designers to reflect on context-related geopolitical and socio-cultural issues of the city of Bolzano through four graphic art interventions in the public space”.⁴³⁸ There are a few days to go before the opening of both Manifesta and our projects. I am doing many things I have never done before, all this feels rather different from writing a dissertation. I cannot sleep well, but I just carry on. There are moments when I am about to faint, it has never happened to me, but the situation is never appropriate for fainting and I always manage to stand up. Angelika is probably more used to these things. We are supposed to meet in front of the RAI building. I don't quite know how I will react and how she will react after the argument we had yesterday. She is already there. I see her, we look at each other with a trembling smile, and after a second we jump in each others' arms.

Isabel and Andreas, that is, Lationamerica y su gente, run every Sunday *Mi Tierra!*, a radio program at Radio Tandem, Bolzano's free radio, still operating since its opening in the late Seventies. I go there every Sunday for more than a month, that is, for the entire length of the project, to talk about Summer Drafts, about what we have done that week and what we are going to do in the approaching one. The first time I go with Angelika, the other times with the artists. Radio Tandem is very different from Radio Rai, there they ask you for your ID card to let you in, here they ask you to drink Isabel's

⁴³⁸ http://www.lungomare.org/pages/index.php?article_id=39&clang=1

canelazo, a hot drink made with rum and cinnamon. To be in *Mi Tierra!* is like being in Isabel's living room. She talks with the microphone as she was talking to me in a bar. She grumbles about Bolzano's politicians, and she does this whilst laughing: all this looks like a sort of brave madness.

We meet Antonio, one of the founders of Radio Tandem, at the ex Gorio, Bolzano's refugee centre. We visit ex Gorio several times, me and Valeria and her friends of the Committee for Radical Diplomacy (CDR). Antonio has been working there for a few years now. We go there and chat with people. There is a courtyard where we sometimes sit and chat. This Summer Drafts implies a lot of chatting, meeting people, conversations every day. They are never interviews on the conditions of the migrants in Bolzano, but chats with them, and of course we also talk with them about Summer Drafts. Some people from ex Gorio take part in it. They speak English, French, little Italian, when we are all together we speak Italian and someone translates to them. Antonio doesn't take part directly in the project, but he follows it through the stories we tell him at the Picchio bar.

The conversations we have with people constantly reshape Summer Drafts. The set of ideas gathered in my room in London get shaken, twisted, partially dropped, shattered, through the different encounters and conversations. From "food as an intercultural tool" we shift to "informal spaces", intended as spaces created by the coming together of different people in non-prescriptive and non-institutional ways. From the conversations we have in Bolzano stories emerge that refer to a lack of such spaces, and to a tendency for informal spaces to get reabsorbed by urban development and institutional interests. A group of Pakistani friends meet every week at the Talvera park to play cricket, and after a while the municipality provides a "proper" cricket field for them. A generous gesture, but where have they gone now?

Caretakers, women taking care of old men and women whilst living with them, in Italian called *badanti*, get Sunday as a day off. They cannot stay at "home" because this means to keep working, but often they have no place to go and they keep wandering around the streets of the city for the entire day.

"Informal spaces" are what, in Franco La Cecla's reading, today's city planners and architects are wiping out. More and more places bear the signature of the architect-star,

and this signature translates into three-dimensional logos that people are forced to inhabit: there is little space left for us to make up a space, every place tends to become rigidly controlled through the fixation of a logo/signature.⁴³⁹ Informal spaces are what the artists taking part in Summer Drafts could build together with the participants, and what La Cecla addresses in his last publication. But informal spaces are not so much a topic the artists of Summer Drafts are supposed to deal with. This is not a topic but an issue which is not clearly perceived as a problem, insufficiently expressed, something that does not get constituted into a visible claim, something that would not appear as a newspaper's headline, for example.

Activism becomes here a way of listening to what is not clearly uttered and stated in a conversation, a way of listening to what is not necessarily expressed in an evident way, a way of responding so that the interlocutor could respond in turn, together with us, through a response which is itself not clearly uttered and stated.

There is not enough money in the budget to pay for the accommodation of the artists, they all stay at my parents' place. All the artists are here together for the opening. *UNWETTER* (that is Benno and four other friends from Berlin), Amy from London, Valeria together with Manuela, then Janna, then Kirsten, as the Committee for Radical Diplomacy, Hiwa from Frankfurt. I ask my friends in Bolzano to host some of the artists, but at the last minute they all let me down, and my parents have to move out of the flat. My father gets bikes for everyone. The first night we are so many in the house, we go to sleep and I feel so weird, asking myself, what have I done! The artists are supposed to leave week after week: each artist or collective has a week of the month assigned for their intervention to occur, and *UNWETTER* are the first to go.

When *UNWETTER* leave my parents come back to the flat, and my mum starts cooking for everyone. Instead of using Lungomare as an HQ for Summer Drafts, as Angelika suggested, we use my parents' kitchen and balcony. The balconies come back, and this time something else takes place on them. We spend most of the time together, and to be together all this time, and to spend it in my mother's kitchen, produces a breaking up of our assigned roles and tasks. I'm supposed to organize and coordinate the project, but Valeria has been helping me from the beginning, and I also have been helping her, discussing the CRD's intervention. Amy films a video for the CRD, and Valeria and

⁴³⁹ Franco La Cecla, *Contro l'architettura*, Bollati Boringhieri, 2008

Manuela help Amy with her intervention to such an extent that it would not be easy to define its authorship. We, all together, Amy, Valeria, Manuela and myself work with the migrant teenagers of the Centro Minori non Accompagnati (CMNA), and in a way the participants are asked to become “artists” in turn.

Some of my old friends get involved in Summer Drafts because I need and ask for practical help. They end up being enticed by the project without realizing too much, they get into it and participate without signing up as participants. Also because of the lack of money we tend to make use of everything we come across, everything available, and also everything I always desired in my most remote dreams: the project becomes almost an excuse for me to take part in a Radio Tandem program, to get to know people from the Langer Foundation, to force my old friends to have a picnic with a group of refugees... And of course to make contact with German speaking people, Tunisian, Pakistani and so on. To work with artists and friends I always wanted to work with. And if we managed to do so many things together it was also because of my mum cooking, my brother driving, my father looking for bikes, the cigarettes smoked on my balcony, the beers drank at Picchio and Nadamas, the baths we take in Monticolo lake.

We try to “marry” each of the four artists / collectives taking part in Summer Drafts with one of the associations involved in the project. Valeria G meets Valeria V, Matthias, Olfa, and starts collaborating with them / Donne Nissa’. I meet Betty from Giant-Bi, an association of Senegalese, Italian and Germans, and I propose to Amy a form of partnership with them.

We open Summer Drafts at Lungomare with Franco La Cecla presenting his new book *Contro l’architettura*, “against architecture”. I introduce Summer Drafts explaining what we mean by “informal spaces”. I clumsily rehearsed the speech with Valeria the day before in a state of panic. Whilst I speak at the opening I look at Valeria who smiles at me, encouragingly, for the whole length of the speech.

Do / So / Sun: 20.07.2008
H 11.00 - opening Summer Drafts
INCONTRO / DISKUSSION / MEETING
Franco La Cecla

After La Cecla’s presentation we go to the Talvera park where UNWETTER are setting up tents to prepare a “discursive picnic”. The picnic is supposed to work as an initial

“situation”, constructed for the participants to meet and get to know each other. The “participants” are very different from each other: there are some friends of mine, some people attracted via Lungomare, members of the associations and their friends, refugees from ex Gorio, teenagers from CMNA, a group of friends of Isabel and Andreas playing drums next to the river, and some passersby.

But food is not necessarily enough in itself to bring people together and make something happen. Especially if the food is a German potato salad. I got angry with UNWETTER, my mother could have organized this picnic herself, and better. They refuse to propose any activity, claiming that it’s important for them to “let things happen”. I try to talk with as many people as I can, as if I am throwing a party, trying to entertain my guests. This picnic is not really “discursive”, it is something like a self-organization without organization.

On top of this, here come the police, some neighbours complained about the drumming. “Who is in charge here?” Everyone points at me. “Shit... I hate you all, cowards” I think. “Have you not asked for an authorization?” says Angelika to me, pretending to be surprised. I feel like punching her face, thank you Angelika, here is the first disastrous event of the project. “Can you show me you authorization?” asks the policeman. Authorization to have a picnic? That’s ridiculous. “We are part of Manifesta, it’s the Museion that authorized this event, this is an artists’ *happening* [I said it in English].” To mention Manifesta, a name that must evoke a sense of mysterious magnitude to the policeman, and to refer to a no less mysterious art *happening*, is enough to get rid of the policeman, but the music has to stop. I ask Alessio to talk about Triangle Trust, and this is a moment when something actually happens in this picnic. Alessio is brilliant at talking, but that’s not enough to get the young migrant boys interested, or even just less spaced out. In the meantime, Franco sleeps on the grass with a newspaper covering his face.

The day after, Franco leads a workshop for social workers. A group of people attend, aligned with the associations involved in the project. Many of them will take part in the following activities of Summer Drafts. If the picnic was not particularly engaging, Franco’s workshop provokes a sort of hurricane. We sit around a table in Lungomare’s courtyard, Franco asks everybody to present themselves and then starts talking in such a way that soon people feel compelled to talk themselves. It is like a storm of bits of

ideas, hints and starting points that bounce back and forth in the form of responses and proposals. “Let’s take out our chairs to occupy streets and parking lots!” “Let’s make use of the pavements!” “Let’s sleep in public, in a park, in a bar!” “Let’s use identity as part of a theatre, and the streets as a showcase for migrants’ identity, for a ‘misunderstanding’ to take place.”⁴⁴⁰ “Let’s organize a cricket match, and ask a cleansing brand to be the sponsor!” As well as the things he says, it is even more the way the conversation is conducted, not something that can be transposed into a technique to be easily apprehended. We are all overexcited, Franco included.

Through my friend Simone I get in contact with the Centro Minori Non Accompagnati (CMNA or Casa Rossa), a structure that hosts migrant boys without a family, teenagers that come to Italy by themselves. At some point, because we find ourselves with too many things to do at the same time, we decide to cancel the workshop with the CMNA, but at the last minute, after the “disastrous picnic”, we change plans again, deciding the night before what to do with the boys. We, myself, Amy, and the artists of the CRD, are sitting around a table covered by empty beer glasses, trying to come up with something for the workshop. We are all exhausted, we try with something like a brainstorm that lasts for a long time, my brain doesn’t work anymore, but Valeria comes up with one of her brilliant ideas: we’ll make together a “Guide of Free Bolzano”, a guide of what you can do for free in the city.

The day after we meet at the Talvera park with the boys and their two teachers, we sit in a circle and Valeria asks everybody to introduce ourselves by explaining the meaning of our name. After explaining to them the idea of producing a Guide of what you can do in Bolzano for free, we divide people into couples or small groups, we give them digital cameras (our own, my parent’s, my friends’...), and we ask them to go around the city and ask passersby “What can you do for free in Bolzano?” After a couple of hours we meet again at Caffè Plural where we look at the pictures and discuss together the interviews. Many of the passersby’s answers were along the lines of: “Here without money there is nothing you can do apart from killing yourself”. But there are some things you can do for free in Bolzano: to look at girls, to take a bath in the Talvera river, play volleyball and football, to go to the OK club (a place we went the weekend before and we had great fun).

⁴⁴⁰ Franco La Cecla, *Il malinteso*, Laterza, 2003.

We meet again two days later at the CMNA to put the publication together. The two teachers are less relaxed than the other day, they seem to be back in their institutional role, inside the walls of the Centre, they behave like schoolteachers with slothful boys. I like the way Amy, Valeria and Manuela do things together with the kids instead of giving them instructions. I sit myself on a table together with everyone else and I start making drawings of the photographs the boys took the day before. I've always been good at drawing, and the boys like my drawings too: for once I become a visual artist myself, as I dreamt when I was in school. Amy makes coloured photocopies of the material and the publication is done. We'll launch it at a party organized by the CRD. I scan it and put it on Summer Drafts' blog, where it still is, and Simone told me that the parents and relatives of the boys are looking to the Guide online from their hometowns.

Workshop by Amy Plant

Saturday, 26th of July 2008

Meeting place: Giardino dei Cappuccini (Piazza Verdi)

For Summer Drafts Amy proposes to deal with “informal learning”, ways in which knowledge is shared and exchanged outside institutional contexts, in our everyday life. Amy talks about informal learning in a meeting with Giant-Bi, a group of people from Senegal and South Tyrol who organize cultural activities across the two places. They have recently invited Senegalese women to South Tyrol for them to meet with women in Val d'Ultimo, the most remote valley of South Tyrol: both groups still use ancient techniques to colour textiles, and the intent was for the women to work together and exchange skills. Amy asks Giant-Bi to talk about experiences of informal learning that involve them in the first person. Elena talks about the day she met Sanoussy and Momar, and how they taught her to play the drum. We decide to re-enact and film this moment at the Talvera park.

Sanoussy teaches something to Elena and the next step is Elena teaching something to someone else, and this someone else teaches something to yet another person, and so on, so that Amy follows the paths of a ramification. A few days later we meet at the Talvera and shoot some footage, Elena and Betty pretend to be attracted by the sound of the drums and get close to Sanoussy and Momar. We decide together the scenes. This

looks as if we were on the set of a b-movie where the actors improvise. A more documentary part consists of an interview with the actors: we sit in circle on the grass, surrounded by shrubs, and Elena tells us her story again. Betty adds her own story, she tells how she became a taxi driver thanks to Momar's encouragement. Betty drives taxis and mini-buses across the villages around Merano. She tells us many stories, about the people she meets during her trips with the mini-bus, about Val Venosta, the valley that goes from Merano to Switzerland.

Betty tells of an anthropologist that came to Val Venosta to do research on local farmers. The anthropologist calls from a pathway two farmers, husband and wife, who are raking the hay. No answer. She tries again, and again no reply. She goes into the field, takes a rake and starts raking, and in the evening she has dinner at their place, and they stay friends for the rest of their life, and their sons are still friends today. Betty tells us about groups of Venostani nomads, sort of nomadic anarchists, who until the Seventies were going around the valleys, up to the Po river, sharpening knives and blades, and bringing news from village to village. Because of its isolation Val Venosta used to be poor, but now is swarming of Tyrolean style hotels attracting thousands of tourists every year, especially from German speaking countries.

We meet Betty another day to come along on her mini-bus adventures. She waits for us in a bar in Lagundo, the village where the bus starts its ride. Betty is together with her friend Heinrich. Heinrich is 96 years old, he is dressed very smartly, with amazing sunglasses, and he is bursting with vitality. Heinrich and Betty met on the mini-bus the first day she was driving. Betty tells us how on that day a crowd of elderly people came to get a ride with the new bus driver, attracted by the unusual fact it was a woman. In such a way Betty made a number of new friends, Heinrich being one of them.

Heinrich cannot stay very long with us, otherwise, he says, his wife gets jealous, and when he goes back he will have to face a row. He is telling us stories of his youth, he travelled the world when he was young before moving back to Lagundo. He tells us stories of friendships, like the one with his Swedish friend, who came to visit him in South Tyrol, and then they exchanged letters for many years, until he didn't get any letters anymore, and understood that he was no longer alive. We go together to the village's cemetery, a place Heinrich likes to visit. He talks about the war, about other friends, it's sometimes difficult to understand him, he shifts from Italian to German, and

in Amy's honour he inserts some English words: "I have a letter for you"... "C' mon guys!"... "Very nice, very nice." He brings us to the end wall of the cemetery, and shows us a huge marble slab filled with the names of people who died in the Second World War. He says something like "all this for stupid people, all this is stupid, nonsense" and shifts to the local dialect... "Would you like to wish something to people, would you like to say something to them?" asks Betty towards the end. Heinrich: "The wish to live. And until there is health, there is wish to live, and when it's time to go... then... [he looks into the camera, smiling] we are... to say goodbye, goodbye... in the other world... we'll see each other." The bell of a campanile rings, it's probably midday, a cable car goes up the mountain, the voice of Abbas recites a Pakistani poem.

CRD ci mancherebbe altro! / fehlt dir etwas?

Meeting: Saturday 2nd of August, Caffè Plural

The Committee for Radical Diplomacy's ideas for Summer Drafts change several times. After meeting Valeria V, Olfa, Matthias, Daniele and Angelika, Valeria G and I go to a bar to take stock of the situation. We talk and talk, only to fall foul of a certain anxiety once again, provoked by this kind of brainstorming. In order to continue I recall what struck me in the conversations we had with people over the previous days. "Valeria V told me that she takes notes of all the idle skills the women contacting the association have, some of them are poets, some others doctors, some are singers, and all of them are here to work as cleaning ladies or caretakers. We could do something with this. I mean, it's not only them, everybody might have something like a skill that isn't being exercised." "What is your skill then? What is it that you would like to do but have had to leave behind?" "I like drawing..." This was the initial discussion that led to *Ci mancherebbe altro / Fehlt dir etwas*. The title means in Italian both "it's no problem at all" and something like "there might be something missing", in German "Do you miss anything?" and "Are you nuts? Is there anything missing in your brain?"

Valeria and the others go around the city by bike to meet the participants and ask them about something missing, something, not necessarily a thing, that is missing in their life, in this city, in general... They write what is missing into a letter and the letters begin to circulate so that everybody receives the letter of someone else, without knowing who

that someone is. With the help of the artists, everybody will respond to this letter during an afternoon we spend going around Bolzano, from Caffè 'Plural to Donne Nissa'. At each stop someone does something, and often this something involves the whole group in an activity. To ask what is missing is to ask for something that you desire and to bring forth something like an issue, a problem, even if it is not quite perceived as such. The circulation of these *missing desires* opens up the possibility for their collective circulation: they stop being merely personal, individuated, tied to a single self.

We make up the couples ourselves, Valeria and I, deciding who is going to respond to whom, on the balcony of my parent's flat. We imagine ourselves as conspirators and cupids at the same time. The missing "things" are very different from each other. Birgit is missing someone telling stories to her, and Nino dresses her as a prince, he places her on the stairs of the old county hall and recites an excerpt from *The Little Prince*. Wunmi has never smoked a cigarette and she would like to try with us, so that Anne asks all the smokers to make a circle, she offers a cigarette to each of them and asks them to tell a story about the first cigarette they smoked. Wunmi sits in the middle of the circle, smoking passively and listening to our stories. At the end she lights a cigarette, inhales, pulls a disgusted face and starts coughing: first one and maybe the last. Janna is missing the times when she used to dress herself up together with her friends, and Cinzia puts lipstick on her and dresses her with a dress of her mother that she used to wear when she was a child. Culibali and Bamba are missing a bicycle, and instead of buying one we get two old bikes and we bring them to Ennio, a neighbour of Rossella, an old man who fixes bikes in his garage and has been doing this all his life. We introduce Culibali and Bamba to Ennio. Valentina and Romina would like to have a drive-in cinema in Bolzano, and Daniele and Angelika play an audiobook for them with a portable CD player, suggesting that they broadcast a reading with Radio Tandem rather than screen a film. Manuel needs more transgression in his life, and Isabel sorts this out by taking her shoes off, putting one of her huge and colourful Colombian skirts on, and dressing Manuel with a Colombian costume, making him dance Colombian music in front of everybody.

We keep doing different things, one after the other, without stopping, and to sign the next move Janna blows a whistle into a flute. It is as if we create something like the "informal spaces" we discussed together with Franco, we occupy different places, the main square, a garden, a hallway, a portion of the pavement, and we do something

together, something that the place itself is not necessarily designed for. But there is more than this. Olfa has never danced with a man in her life, she has been married since she was very young, and her husband does not like dancing. Mangesh plays some music for them at Donne Nissa', where the journey ends, and in a minute everybody starts dancing like crazy, the room is filled with people, the boys of the CMNA are here as well. I'm the only one who is not dancing, I cannot move, I just look at everybody and I feel like something gets untied in my body, tears pressure my eyes, as if I cannot believe all this, and they do not believe it either: something is happening.

We stay at Donne Nissa' until late, and whilst the others are still dancing, Manuel tells me a story about Luigi Nono, he tells me this as if he was Luigi Nono himself, he tells me how he is writing scores, and at the end of the story, when Luigi Nono dies, he burst into tears. A policeman passes by and stares at us with a concerned look. "It's ok, he is fine, it's just that Luigi Nono died a minute ago." The policeman leaves with a sort of unconvinced look. We close Donne Nissa' and go to Picchio, and from Picchio to Antonio's place. Amy, Valeria and Janna stagger holding each other and laughing until they drop onto Antonio's sofa.

The day after everyone leaves, Amy, Valeria, Janna: my parents' house is empty and I am left by myself. But soon Hiwa arrives, he will organize a "Cooking with Mama": he will communicate via skype with his mother in Iraq who will show us how to cook Kurdish rice balls. This will be a party more than anything else, an evening at Lungomare to mark the provisional end of Summer Drafts. We start cooking, in Lungomare's yard, just a few of us, whilst the rest of the people are chatting or watching, and Hiwa is busy around his laptop. It seems as if this cooking with mama is not going to be much more than a dinner party. But the sky gets rapidly covered by clouds and soon a heavy rain starts pouring. This is when the cooking with mama begins: everyone starts doing something, trying to save speakers, rice, laptops and ourselves from the rain, moving pots, holding oilcloths, shouting, laughing, getting wet, passing the videocamera from hand to hand, passing rice balls around. In the meantime Hiwa's mother flirts via skype with David, who could be her son. Friends who I have not seen since the beginning of the summer suddenly appear at the party, and my entire family comes as well, together with people from Manifesta, and with the guys of the refugee centre.

Once Hiwa is gone as well I am really left by myself, myself together with the participants of Summer Drafts. But Summer Drafts is over now. From the beginning it was important for us to establish something that could continue without us, beyond us. We have a meeting at Caffè' Plural to sum up what we have done and to discuss what could be next. Many people want to carry on right now, and do more, do something, they look at me as if I had the answer, but I don't, and the project is over, the money is over, and I'm left by myself together with them. I feel upside-down with what has happened in these last few weeks, open and exposed, my bowels gurgle, and I think many others feel something like this. We need to do something but we don't quite know what to do.

We had a structure in place until the day before, we had artists coordinating activities, now we are still together but something is missing. Something has happened, something like a distress that makes you think: "I cannot live as I used to live before, now everything has to be different." But some people react with an even stronger return to themselves and their individual needs. They seem to channel and identify what has happened into a private sphere of love or career aspirations, they pull back forces even more stoutly into themselves (they rapidly reconstruct for themselves a body *with* organs). It is as if a collective maddening desire generated throughout this month gets domesticated into the individual desire of a subject for an object. And this makes me angry, and upset! What I think is: "they got it wrong! We didn't do all this for it to end up in such a way! Looking for 'true' love, looking for your private benefit! If this was the starting point in something like *Ci mancherebbe altro*, what we have done became collective, it was circulating, instead of being fastened into an individual fixation." But here it's not a matter of getting it right. For me this is the hardest moment of Summer Drafts, also because people ask for my help, they want me to sort this out, as if I was responsible for what happened, and yes I am, but not by myself. This is another problem I feel: how to withdraw whilst organizing something like this, how to disappear from the role of the one who organizes, how to share this with others, how to make this role circulate amongst us, beyond us?

We didn't manage to create something more long lasting with this Summer Drafts, what is missing is something solid enough in place for us to deal with these unsettling energies, to prevent them from falling back into stratified patterns: I, myself, my status as a single, my new career as an artist...

Everyone returns to their individual bodies, affects are turned into affections. But this diagnosis, sensible as a general indication, is perhaps restrictive in itself: how can I myself register what is happening now that the project is over? Selma takes her veil off, falls in love with my brother, and leaves her husband. Mirco fancies Birgit, and gets jealous of my brother because he thinks he is fond of Birgit as well. As a consequence Selma gets jealous too. After a year Mirco has sex with a girl for the first time, and we throw a party to celebrate this. He starts collaborating with Latinoamerica y su gente, he teaches Italian to migrants for them. Today, after two years, he has a lover, he has completely disappeared, no one sees him anymore, we know that he has become a full time artist, he is not even using his facebook account that was before his obsession and the source of his friendships. Selma is now back with her husband but with her own conditions, she is planning to study law and open a studio to help migrant women who have troubles with their husbands. Anne starts going to the Ex Gorio refugee centre, she is now close friend with Iranian and Pakistani families and tries to help them as much as she can. Matthias leaves Caritas and moves to London first and then Berlin. Nino reclaims the streets, as suggested by La Cecla, organizing “Cakes of the World”, asking everybody to cook cakes and give them as presents in the streets to passersby (apparently some old ladies run away screaming...). Teodora comes late, at the presentation in Manifesta, when Summer Drafts is already over, but she soon becomes part of the “group”. As in Pasolini’s *Teorema* everyone seems to take their own path, after a couple of years there is no gang anymore, even if some solid friendships have been born of it. Are these Summer Drafts’ results? They would not count as results for the funding bodies, that’s for sure.

“What struck me the most about the meeting at Caffè Plural was the group of people itself”, says Simone, “they look so different from each other.” Simone is not referring, or not just, to the different colours of our skin, to our different ages. This is a cluster of people different from each other in several ways, crossing several categories. These categories don’t disappear but they can be troubled in unrestrained ways. What takes place is not “multicultural”, or “intercultural”, if these terms indicate a process where different cultures are simply placed happily together or in contact with each other. What takes place has to do with cultural identities, but it has to do with many other categories and identities as well.

What happened through Summer Drafts has not happened on the basis of an horizontality – we are all alike and we should all love each other. We might be “equal” as human beings, but we are not reducible to human beings, and this equality is an abstraction, as much as a human being is a reductive abstraction. In every situation there is always a power relation underway, a relation of forces crossing categories and strata of different kinds. Transversality troubles the fixity and hierarchy of this power machines. But it does not aspire to a levelled condition where power relations are flattened out horizontally. It is not the horizontal versus the vertical. Horizontality is an aspiration that takes different forms, and, I think, has accompanied me throughout Summer Drafts, and this is has been one of the problems of this first Summer Drafts. If it takes the solid form of an end, or a beginning, this aspiration to a horizontality could no doubt take a repressive form.

After the meeting at Caffe’ Plural we keep seeing each other, we organize a trip to Manifesta in Rovereto, a talk at *Tabula Rasa* (a series of events that a friend organizes as part of Manifesta in Bolzano), a walk in the mountains near Bressanone. Olfa has been living in Bolzano for many years, but she has never been to the woods. She is terrified and reluctant to climb, Birgit and I have to distract her, we keep telling her that “we are almost there”. We reach a refuge and Olfa decides to wait for us there. The rest of us are going to reach the cross at the top of the mountain. We head straight towards the cross, missing the footpath entirely from the beginning. Matthias is leading us and soon we are in the middle of a thin wood, then the wood becomes a stretch of rhododendron bushes, and finally the bushes become rocks and stones. The cross is above us. We slowly walk up onto the rocks in order to reach it. We lose Manuel and my sister, and some more people along the way. To reach the ridge we end up crawling on our hands and knees. We get to the ridge and look down, the rocks are jutting out, more and more mountains appear behind. The cross is not far but is impossible to reach. We sweat, all red in the face, our bodies flattened against the ground, the fingers clinging to rocks, we look at each other, and look at the gorge that opens below, on the other side.

Slowly we start crawling back. At the beginning of the wood we find my sister and Manuel, who got lost and walked in circles for some time. Back at the refuge we find Olfa in tears. “What’s wrong Olfa, were you worried for us?” “No, I don’t know why I’m crying, I was looking at the cows, the mountains, the grass, the smell, and I was

thinking that it is beautiful here, and I was thinking about my life, and I've started crying."

But it's time to go back now, we continue the descent, we get lost again, and finally we are about to reach the cars, the sun is setting, and we stop one more time, as if we would not really like to return home. We look at the mountain in front of us, its colour is changing, and still, in silence, we look at it as if we have never seen it before.

Someone is falling in love, as a way to turn this into something recognizable, into something manageable to a certain extent, as the beginning of a process of digestion. The summer is ending and soon I will have to return to London, to start working again, and this makes me feel sick. I will never write these summer drafts into my dissertation, I think, I don't want to spoil this, I cannot tell what has happened to me, what is happening to us, I don't want to take stock of all this. But now I'm here, writing, two years later, unhappy with this account of Summer Drafts that I don't really know where is going.

Summer Drafts is therapeutic, a cure against Berlusconi's neoliberal soap opera with its plastic-faced protagonists, against the Lega Nord soap opera with its stiff and self-cleaning bodies. It is an unleashing of affects, a desiring machine which undoes separations, through which different "others" get mutually recomposed. Summer Drafts is the production of a collective madness, a going off the tracks where the boundaries of roles and categories are troubled.

This going off the tracks has been prepared to some extent. Summer Drafts has a methodology of B series: this is a homemade, cheap methodology, a not being really professional, a proceeding without determinate outcomes. And it is this that allows different things to keep bursting forth, with an unforeseeable and uncontrollable set of consequences.

APPENDIX 9: Pedagogical analysis

It is not as a researcher but as someone who works at Goldsmiths that I would like to write a macroanalysis of academia, presenting some "case studies". Unless research was

understood in terms of a militant research, as suggested by Precarias a la deriva. I do this analysis by myself, but inspired by Precarias, by the close way in which they collectively follow, discuss and analyse each other's daily working life. Their collective analysis constitutes the basis by which to think and take action. Of course is very different to analyse my working life by myself, but this is just the beginning of an attempt that will perhaps take a collective and more articulated form in the future.

Two pedagogical cases

Case 1

I used to attend departmental guest lectures rather often, mainly because they took place right after the Grad Dip Lab sessions I teach. I never took part in the discussions though. I listened to the others, sometimes teachers ask great questions. One day, I was particularly tired, and also bored, the lecture was not particularly interesting. The questions were not very exciting either, the conversation was dragging itself, and at some point I got annoyed, the whole thing was irritating. Without thinking I raised my hand and was thereby called upon to speak. But I haven't really prepared the question... I know I want to say something about an essay by Foucault, but I don't remember the title ("The Life of Infamous Men"). I try to explain what this essay is about, but it is some time since I read it. It has to do with something the lecturer described, and I would like to relate the two things, Foucault's text and the lecturer's anecdote. But I don't really know how to carry on now... I ask for help. People start giggling.

My language, the tone of my voice, must sound rather inappropriate, I guess: not very sophisticated, not very elegant, and pretty straightforward ("help me!"). I would have wished to disappear immediately and forever from the room, but there was no time for that: I had to make some sense of what I was saying. Someone comes to my rescue, he knows the essay and yes, there is something there for him as well, he tells us the title and content and himself attempts a connection with the lecturer's material. Not much comes out of this perhaps, but at least the usual setting of the guest lecture, where everybody tends to perform an already consolidated role, gets upset.

After the lecture Irit comes to me: “Paolo, after so many years you still don’t know how to finish your sentences.” I hate you Irit, you have been telling me this a thousand times. “Anyway”, she continues “I think it was an interesting attempt to create a different modality of conversation.” I don’t have the strength to answer much. And yes, this is what I’m thinking as well. Something happens not through the use of skills and abilities, not through a powerful action, but through an annoyance, boredom and clumsiness, and through a call for help.

Walser (The Robber) kneels in a park to pick up the toy fallen from the hands of a baby, provoking the displeasure of the mothers in the park, and putting himself in an embarrassing situation. This is not how a man should behave! What could this improper and embarrassing situation give rise to?

Case 2

“Knowledge is what it is; one can hardly avoid it for the purpose of acquiring a minimum of tonus, of consistency, when faced with a patient [student] or faced with an institution. But it is basically made in order to be channeled off into other things.”⁴⁴¹

The Graduate Diploma Lab in the academic year 2009/2010 was probably the best of all: the atmosphere was relaxed, the students communicative, the level of the discussion high. Towards the end of the year something strange happens: some students start repeating what I was saying, as a way of explaining my words to the rest of the class. At first I was uncomfortable with that. This is not supposed to happen, I thought, it’s as if I’m not very good at explaining myself as a teacher. And the students take the liberty to make it apparent, acting as teachers themselves, instead of me. After these initial thoughts I felt that, actually, something remarkable was taking place. We managed, all together, and without planning it, to change the power relationships of the group. I was not at the centre of the stage anymore. It was not only me who was responsible for the conversation. We had something else from the usual bidirectional to and fro, questions and answers, teacher and student relationship.

⁴⁴¹ Guattari, “La Borde: A Clinic Unlike Any Other”, in *Chaosophy*, Semiotext(e) 2009, p 192.

- How did this happen? My answer is: through a series of uncertainties, through my hesitations, through my difficulty in expressing myself, through my lack of authority...
- Me, me, me, I said above it was “us”! As if the teacher would be the only artificer of what happens in class.
- But I like the idea that something like an uncertainty, rather than a concentration of power and skills, could make something like that happen.
- Sure, that’s brilliant, that’s what happens with Walser, but if I think of myself as the source of uncertainty, I end up centralizing the dynamics anyway.
- Ok, but still, I would like to learn how to make this shift of roles and power relations happen on purpose, how to instigate moments like that, how to use my uncertainty more lucidly as a tool.
- This sounds more Jacotot than Walser. Good luck with that!

Macroanalysis of education

The privatization of education, its neoliberalization, goes together with a compulsion to “lifelong learning” that Deleuze already indicated in his “Postscript to the Society of Control”: lifelong learning becomes a tool for what Deleuze calls “control”, a form of control that penetrates our bodies, the more minute and less perceptible aspects of our lives.⁴⁴² We are required to learn over the course of our entire life (and we often have to pay for this): we learn in schools, universities, trainings, seminars and workshops, conferences, evening courses of all kinds, third age courses, after-school courses, and then from TV, newspapers and magazines, from professionals and all manner of experts, museums and galleries, newsletters... We need to be always up to date, at every age and stage of our lives, we need to keep up with this incrementally growing production of knowledge. This is also the sense of Deleuze’s “control”: we are compelled to be educated and educate ourselves to the contemporary, compelled to keep

⁴⁴² Deleuze, “Postscripts to the Societies of Control”, in Deleuze, *Negotiations*, Columbia University Press, 1995, pp. 177-182.

up with everything new around us by exposing ourselves to a total education, inside and outside the institutions, and this education tends to erase all the *possible* we could think and imagine, and all the available time to think and imagine the *possible*. Creativity is inscribed into this framework of the continually up-to-date. And through this framework a series of limits are drawn across the possibilities available to me: the possible is reduced here to a controlled range of variations allowed to myself. The more we “learn” to live, the more we lose the ability to live (to live otherwise).

Learning is more and more something that has to do with a job and a career, with a professionalization, with working: learning to work. And learning to work means not only learning to do a job, but more broadly learning to “work” as part of a system, learning to function inside the capitalist machinery. It means learning to live, or better learning to survive, if with “living” we intend to live otherwise. Education, outside this “profitable” framework, has little space in our lives. Education today is not just an institutional tool that a constituted Power exploits in order to channel a set of established values. Students are required to be active, creative, participative, and not (simply) empty vessels waiting to be filled. They have to learn how to work collaboratively, creatively, imaginatively, they have to be trained as neoliberal workers.

Microanalysis of education

In this chapter I start from something personal, something that is part of my life, and something that tends to turn my stomach, that makes me upset. I have been teaching the Graduate Diploma Lab at Goldsmiths, in the Visual Cultures department, for several years. Despite the periodical changes I make to the structure of the course, there is something that doesn’t work. Or maybe someone: myself. The role I occupy is at once rigid and precarious, precarious first of all in the strict sense that I never know if they are going to renew my annual contract. I take three different teaching jobs each year, in the hope that I will get at least one. As Precarias a la deriva say, precariousness is not just a working condition, it is a living condition.⁴⁴³ Precarity is also the breakdown of the self previously described, the “dividual” as a fragmentation of ourselves and our lives that Deleuze writes of in the “Postscript to the Societies of Control”.⁴⁴⁴ Our self

443 Marta Malo ed., *Nociones comunes*, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

444 Deleuze, “Postscripts to the Societies of Control”, *op. cit.*

gets shattered, our life dispersed, precarious, mobilized, controlled in such a way that we as individuals are multiplied in our productivity, required to serve capital by giving ourselves over to a series of variations, in the form of a flexible personality. We work, we serve (capital), as individuals of individuals. Fragments of ourselves: there is always a self that holds them together, there is always a collaboration between individuals at the basis of neoliberal productivity. For now, I write this microanalysis posing questions to myself, reading Precarias, asking questions to my friends, and whoever I happen to encounter.

I teach the Grad Dip seminar at Goldsmiths by myself. I feel a bit isolated from the rest of the department in comparison with other colleagues who teach the same course to different groups of students. I am often scared, if anything goes “wrong” it will be my fault: I’m not really good enough, I’m not the charismatic teacher that I should be. In class I stutter. My sentences are confused, I cannot speak properly, I lose the thread of what I’m saying, my speech is subject to fragmentation. “Paolo, you never finish your sentences!” says Irit in my head. I speak rather slowly, trying to avoid grammar mistakes. I forget words and names, and sometimes fail to arrive at the things I had intended to say. I know I look calm in spite of all this. They stare at me and I wander what they think. Difficult to tell from their blank faces. Difficult to tell unless I force them to speak. I don’t like to be at the centre of attention, but I suppose this is inevitable if you work as a teacher... I hate to put up a public performance. I don’t like to embody this role of someone knowledgeable, skilful, and in control, which is projected onto me by default. It’s hard for me to talk, and I have chosen a job that forces me to do that. During the break I run away to smoke a cigarette, to stay a bit by myself. I spend so much time preparing the Lab, even if it’s always the same material. I’m so slow, slower than anyone else. I’m not really sure I deserve this job. I should be more intelligent in order to be a teacher, my ability for abstract thinking is zero, and I have a real problem in expressing myself. My English is awful, embarrassing, I keep making mistakes. Sometimes I’m so nervous in class that I cannot even understand what the students say. “There is something wrong with me, I shouldn’t be here, there’s something wrong...” Certainly, if this year the Lab is not going very well, if every time my belly aches before going, if I count the sessions left before the end of the year, it’s my fault, it’s me, me, me. The squeezed self is still obsessed with itself. In this sense the individual, although dispersed, is stronger than ever.

Schizoanalysis of education

I write down my feelings and thoughts, this is not a confession, it is a possibility for you to read something that seems to be about oneself, that is, about us, and not necessarily “us teachers”, but “us precarious”, us “Precarias”, all of us. It is a way of saying: we, precarious, are all on the same boat, but separated in different cabins; we often don’t even know that we are on the same boat, and we think that if there is anything wrong with our job, with our life, this must be a consequence of something wrong inside ourselves, something related to our characters, traumas, parents or education. Let’s try something like a schizoanalysis, a way to displace desires, unblock them, recreate them, from the personal to the collective and beyond, a way to read desires not on the basis of an inner self, but in connection with everything else.

Schizoanalysis can be a tool to read “my” desires as someone else’s desires, as “collective” desires, not in the sense that the same desire belongs to a group of people, but that desires pass through us, through institutions, societies and worlds... and in this passing they might move, change, transform something. Desires are not inside us, they cross our bodies, setting them in motion. Schizoanalysis is not an “interpretation”, says Guattari: it does not formulate a convincing explanation of the reason why I feel unhappy with my teaching, in order to better know myself and my limits, and to try, with the help of an analyst, to “feel better”, to fit better into this world.⁴⁴⁵

The last time I went to a psychologist he said to me: “Why do you want to teach? You are obviously not suited for this job. You do this because you have a masochist tendency, you are trying to harm yourself.” What is *my* problem with teaching? I might find out that this is not just “my” problem. And the point is not to treat it as a problem that needs to be understood, and attenuated, or solved accordingly. Rather than solving my problem I try to open it up, I try to unlock bits and pieces, thinking the problem not as something which calls for a solution. Or even better we do this collectively.

Schizoanalysis reads, unpacks, and constructs again desiring machines, assemblages and concatenations. There is no origin inside (of me) and no end outside as a solution of

⁴⁴⁵ Guattari, “Dictionary of Schizoanalysis” in Guattari, *The Anti-Oedipus Papers*, Semiotext(e), 2006, pp 415-422.

the problem. Schizoanalysis can be a specification to Precarias' statement above: feminism is to take our everyday life as a battlefield for a never-ending battle.⁴⁴⁶

In an essay "on school" Guattari talks about schizoanalysis in a pedagogical context. Pedagogy and therapy are brought together, the teacher is rendered a sort of analyst, but one who takes part in the analytic process. "In the field of 'education' for instance, the problem will not be the application of pedagogical methods anymore, but of analytic-militant micro set ups that could crystallize around a class, a school, a group of children, etc. In which direction does a collective desire look for itself? What interventions could help it leaving the territorialities that surround it? What could I do in that situation, not as a teacher, but as a participant? It's the contrary of psychologism and 'psychoanalysis'. It's not a matter of reducing the unconscious, of bending it onto universal unities, onto personalized transfers, of laying it down on specialist couches, of subjecting it to the supposed knowledge of the analyst, but of opening it up in all directions, sometimes to minuscule lines of flight, other times to possibilities of working, on a broader scale, at the transformation of society."⁴⁴⁷ From a schizoanalysis of myself as the "sick" teacher, to a schizoanalysis where I become the analyst, to a schizoanalysis performed collectively: everybody has their part in it. It is not a matter of curing sick students, just as it is not a matter of transmitting knowledge so as to eradicate a students' ignorance. The movement goes from an individual to a collectivity: to collectively manipulate the contemporary pathologies which make desire shrink back onto our individual selves, to learn how desire could pass across us, to make a collective desire passing through us and through the knowledge, institutions and worlds we deal with together, in and outside the classroom.

A short poem about networking

Last night I dreamt that I was at a party and no one was talking to me, I was completely isolated. And in a way I am. Networking. I have always been scared of people, as far as I remember (it's me, it's my fault, there's something wrong with me). Networking is a

⁴⁴⁶ This sense of "feminism" as a never ending fight, as the impossibility of satisfaction, as a desire that dislocates the linearity of chronological time, emerges strongly from Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames*, a film (visibly) made in the '80s (1983), using (often fake) archival materials, and set up in an impossible future of a Socialist United States of America: the film starts with a speech by a black president, and ends with a terrorist attack to the twin towers perpetrated by a feminist army faction. The temporal dislocation gets even stronger today because of the sense of an almost ridiculous prophecy.

⁴⁴⁷ Guattari, "Sulla scuola" in Guattari, *La rivoluzione molecolare*, Einaudi, 1978, p 102. This text is not published in the English edition of *Molecular Revolution*.

vital activity for a career, for an academic, for a cultural organizer. I recently realized how my friends use their PhD to network, to get to know people they are interested in. I should do this as well, I should find someone (alive) I'm interested in. I've recently made a list. I'm scared of talking with people and I hate pushing myself forward. Improbable that I work as a tutor, a job that doesn't suit my personality. I should be a writer, but I write only in my spare time, and only this PhD, during Christmas and the summer holiday. I know very few people, I have very few friends here in London. And none of my friends are people who really "count". I'm obsessed with measuring my intelligence with that of everybody else: if someone is more intelligent than me I get scared, and I feel ashamed of my stupidity: it happens often. If I was intelligent like Valeria, Rachel, etc. I could network more easily. You don't necessarily need to be intelligent to network, it's enough to be funny. But no doubt the more qualities you have the better.

What would it be to *double* networking? Networking could also be used (but not necessarily) to meet and cultivate relationships with people that you like, with someone that could also become a friend. In this way you feel less lonely. When I am in Bolzano I go out with Daniele and Angelika and we talk about things we like. I hate networking. Today we have more opportunities to meet people (we have to meet more people), we travel more (we have to travel more), we write emails (we have to write emails), we use facebook (we have to use facebook). Relationships happen faster. They tend to be more shallow, but (maybe) not necessarily so. They can be working relationships, but they can be also friendships, as I said, or a form of friendship. Maybe. Not always.

Today it's hard to distinguish working time from leisure time. It's difficult to distinguish friendships from working relationships. Rather than writing in such a stupid way I should tell a story. I might talk about nanopolitics. I like nanopolitics very much, and still it takes so much to become friends. Despite all that intimacy, all those emotions and ideas shared, we are not friends at all, after a year! Not even on facebook... They might think I'm a bit stupid. Or not politically engaged enough. My friends in Bolzano do all sorts of courses, from kick-boxing to sewing, someone told me that this is the only way left to get to know other people. Networking can be a way to get to know people that you might like, people you might collaborate with. I spend most of my time in front of the computer, doing I can't remember what, and the few times a year I see my friends I'm so detached that I don't have much to say to them. What do I want to do

with this networking? It's yet another problem I have with myself, alongside teaching. Alongside but very much related to it, to my career, I should really do something about it. I should deal with all this crap that has to do with myself. I like networking, I like networking, I like networking, I like networking...

APPENDIX 10: **Summer Drafts 2: art, activism, pedagogy**

To present and discuss, often in a dialogic form, the activities of Summer Drafts 2 and what they have generated, would be a way of introducing pedagogical methods and tools practiced by artists and activists in non-academic contexts.

Talking about Summer Drafts and the different pedagogical processes it initiate could also function as an introduction to a reading of Walser as a pedagogue, to the formulation of a Walserian pedagogical method.

Simone, Freire, Ultra-red

Elliot Perkins of Ultra-red comes to Bolzano to work together with the young migrants of the Casa Rossa as part of Summer Drafts.⁴⁴⁸ “What is the Sound of the Border?” is a good example of how the discursive and the affective can be brought together in a pedagogical process. The participants in the workshops are a group of migrant teenagers who came to Bolzano without parents, hosted by the Casa Rossa where my friend Simone has been working for many years. At the first meeting Elliot asks the kids to think a place in Bolzano that is “important” for them. Two groups with different itineraries are formed. We walk as a group in silence around the city, each person in turn leads the group towards the place he (the kids are all boys) has chosen. Once there, we record the sound of the place for a minute. “What do you hear?” That’s the question Elliot gives to us for the walk. We go around the city listening. The walk will be followed by a conversation.

The format in itself is simple, but I got completely overwhelmed by this walk. Such a simple device has a very intense effect on us. I walk in a group, together with people I

⁴⁴⁸ On their website Ultra-red provide detailed descriptions of some of the workshops they organize: www.ultrared.org

have never seen before, and we feel strong straight away, like an army wandering around the city. Through silence and listening a strong intensity forms around us, an energy completely different from that nervous and self-absorbed vibration of the passersby. We are different together, together we do something different. Sometimes people stare at us, they don't understand. People we know says hello to us, but we carry on walking. This is something like going from A to B with no purpose, with a different purpose from the one we have every day, different from that of everyone else around us. We are freed from our usual thinking: "where I am going, why, what I should do, how should I speak, what do I need to do?" We just follow each other and we are free to listen, listen to the city, to ourselves. This is like a *dérive*, a constructed situation, a simple walk in the city is "doubled", becoming something else. It produces a different perception of the city and of ourselves within the city, a way of opening up something else, of seeing a different possibility for the same city. I feel like we fall in love, and we do in a way. No need to talk, no need to get to know each other through words.

We go back to the Casa Rossa where we have a discussion, I translate from English to Italian and write on a flipchart what we have listened to. Simone is overexcited, he cannot stop talking. Elliot has an amazing way of pushing the conversation up, towards an intellectual complexity, in a way that challenges our thoughts, whilst at the same time he gives us holds, telling stories, making examples: even when he talks about John Cage he does that in a way that the shine of his eyes reverberates in us. He talks about the police, he touches on things that have to do with the experience the kids had of the city, he unlocks bits and pieces of those stories in us, relating them to the *dérive* we have just produced.

All this was missing from the previous Summer Drafts, at the end we were a small crowd of people brought to the point of madness, unable to talk together, think together, discuss together. The kids come up with amazing questions and reflections: "What does it mean to listen?" ... "There are ways to listen that happen not only through the ears..." The workshop goes on for a few days, the kids edit soundtracks translating their listening to the city and its borders into sound. I cannot take part in the rest of the process, I meet them usually for lunch, but I can see that Elliot is in love as well, and so too the kids. In a way he got trapped in the machine he set up, willingly. Here there is something other than an art project or a pedagogical workshop at stake. In a way we could say that through "love" the rational structure of the workshop leaks everywhere.

At the end of the week the kids present at Lungomare the sounds recorded and recomposed together.⁴⁴⁹ They ask us, the audience, to write down, on the tables around which we are sitting, “what do you hear”: what do you hear in what we hear, your city listened from the edge of a border? After this presentation Elliot leaves, but the kids will carry on listening, asking others to listen in turn, by using Radio Tandem.⁴⁵⁰ Elliot had long conversations not only with the kids but also with the staff of the Casa Rossa. When back in the UK he sends a long email, starting to write different possible trajectories to open up in Bolzano.

As they also state on their website, Ultra-red are inspired by Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.⁴⁵¹ Freire offers a model of diffuse pedagogy, where learning is not a unidirectional procedure dispatched by a master towards his students. The pedagogue has a specific role and specific competences, yet takes part in the learning process from within. Freire’s method, and this is another important aspect for Ultra-red, often makes use of visual material, of the visual (in Ultra-red the aural) as a medium that differs from spoken or written language, and a medium drawing beyond the availability of consciousness. What is the sound of the border? What is the sound of racism? We don’t quite know, and still we attempt some answers, using words, using sounds, we enquire at the limit of perception. “We begin without demand. We are without object. It is our task to organize the silence in which we begin. A felt need – shared and articulated as a collective demand – may be a catalyst for a militant sound investigation. A felt need is only one contour in an unbounded field of desire. To order the desires that guide us to our demand we do not demand to begin. Silence is the condition for listening. That is, listening is a site for the organization of politics. In listening, we order desires in

⁴⁴⁹ Lungomare is an independent art centre in Bolzano www.lungomare.org

⁴⁵⁰ Radio Tandem is Bolzano’s free radio, set up in 1977, a year in which many free radios were born in Italy, including Radio Alice.

⁴⁵¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum, 2000, and Ultra-red, “A Preliminary Outline of Paulo Freire’s ‘Thematic Investigation’ as Cultural Action, Chapter 3, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968). Prepared by Ultra-red for discussion, revision, dissemination, and practice.”

http://www.nonsitecollective.org/system/files/UR_Freire%20Method.pdf

From chapter 3 of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Janna Graham, Dont Rhine, Robert Sember create a set of detailed instructions to be used by anyone for “cultural actions”. In the introduction they criticize the copyright tendency of Freirian institutions, and they talk about the “politicization” that Freire’s method underwent through to the revolutionary movements in Central America in the ‘70s and ‘80s.

relation to need and so *transition to demand*.”⁴⁵² But then the question arises: where is this (political) transition in Summer Drafts, and where is it in this thesis?

“What is it that makes Elliot’s workshop different from the usual workshops you do with the kids?” I ask Simone. “I ask you this because I would like to think of an answer myself.”

“Mmmm... I would say that Elliot managed to make the kids think, to get them involved by making them think about themselves and their lives.”

Caro Simone,

I write to you in order to address what Paulo Freire says in chapter 3 of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, because yesterday I wasn’t able to tell you much of this.

Yesterday I was saying how the “oppressed” that Freire speaks of have become *potentially* everyone today: educators and students, literates and illiterates, migrants and natives. Potentially means that the division between oppressed and oppressors is neither clear cut nor stable, it is more difficult to identify a class or a group of exploiters (but this difficulty does not prevent us from doing it). The forms of oppression are different from those in Brazil in the ‘60s. When Freire talks about the animal and the differences with the human being, you can tell that with “animal” he understands the oppressed whilst the “human being” is the free being. Freire seems to talk not only about Brazil in the ‘60s, but also us today, we, who are oppressed, and often unable to sense this

⁴⁵² And follows: “This science of struggle is often called pedagogy, or, the dialogical formation of demands. Pedagogy requires silences of some duration. The initial subject of an inquiry – the research militant – dissolves in pedagogical time. The research militant is neither the hero nor the punctuation of collective action. The research militant increasingly comes into her or his irrelevance. The research militant is a technician of silence. This is a rejection of the value form of participation in which thousands serve simply as echo to the voice of the ideological patron.” [...] “If the microphone is only used to make oneself heard, then one has mistaken the microphone for a mallet. The demand scripted by an ideological patron, movement leaders, representatives and the ones supposed to know better than we, organizes a politics of one. That one only uses the microphone to make himself heard. Thus: the echo of amplification occupies a site that would otherwise be used for organizing by a collective; and, the organization of participation by the amplification occupies a site that would otherwise be used to organize toward collective demands. If we operate according to an acoustics of change, the one who holds the microphone listens in the space of silence. Silence is the desire of the other. It organizes a politics of many. If the microphone is only used to amplify oneself, then one may as well have grabbed a hammer.” Ultra-Red, “10 Preliminary Theses on Militant Sound Investigation”, Issue 5 of *Artists & Activists*, Publisher Printed Matter, 2008. This is an important text by Ultra-red, which provides a background for my account of Elliot’s workshops in Bolzano. The text is also a sort of continuation of a conversation initiated by Precarias a la deriva and Colectivo Situaciones on “militant research” (see the texts gathered in Marta Malo ed., *Nociones Comunes*, *op.cit.*).

oppression; we who simply “adapt” ourselves to the environment, to our surroundings, as an animal would do, instead of “transforming” ourselves and the “world”, that which surrounds us, as “human beings” would do.

Nota a margine: Caro Simone, it is not (just) a matter of consciousness, as Freire seems to suggest, it is not (just) a matter of being conscious of our oppression, it is not a matter of using this consciousness as a basis for transformation, for political action. “What is the sound of the border” is not (just) a way of making your kids conscious of their conditions of oppression. There is much more than this at stake.

We, like “animals”, adapt ourselves to what is already in place (we passively change according to the circumstances), but also we, as humans, can (actively) transform ourselves and our world. We could question these oppositions by thinking Freire’s “freedom” in terms of “possibility”: freedom not as a status of the human being, but as a practice, freedom not as something simply attributable to humans, but something which crosses their separation from the world. “Freedom” becomes freedom not only from an oppressor, but from a status quo, from a destiny, from human predictability, from what is given: freedom as a way of constructing possibilities, it slips into inconceivable unknowns. And this unknown is not necessarily far away.

“Oppression” is a suppression of the possible, it is not only the batons of the police, it is not only an oppression that comes from outside ourselves, inflicted on us by other people. We might have the feeling that we have never been as free as today: free to choose between a hundred interesting things to do, all more or less similar... but we are also forced to choose all hundred, or as many as we can (and cannot).

If I feel fucked up, the “cause” of this sensation is usually attributed to myself, or another (today this is often the “foreigner” invading our beautiful country, and this is a discourse that even “foreigners” sometimes adopt), or, more rarely the “system” (a term that was much more popular when we were little kids, in the ‘70s). Who is the culprit of my malaise (my oppression)? Myself: “it is because of your character, because of your traumas, because of your parents,” says psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis (and priests, especially in Italy). This has been said for such a long time that there is no need for the psychologists’ discourse any longer, it comes “naturally” to think that there is something wrong with me, to think that if I feel unwell it is because of my own

biography and because of who I am. In order to feel well, like Freire's "animals", we have learned that we have to adapt to the world as it is. It is this that we are constantly re-learning, inside and outside the school, it is us who have to adapt to a "system", to a global machinery which could be called "capitalism". But it is this "system", the objective order as such, which makes us sick: we cannot separate ourselves from it, it seeps inside us, the animal cannot be separated from its world. And to say that a whole system cannot be changed or destroyed is to think like Freire's animals, who cannot sense the possible, who are led to ignore it.

Psychologists, psychiatrists, psychoanalysts (yoga teachers, Grinberg professionals, and so on) are often good at making us feel better, that is, at making us function better inside the system, ensuring we progressively adapt to the latter.

Even without the direct operations of a psychologizing machine or a bodily-relief machine, the personalizing obsession is there for everybody; in the case of the "foreigner" for example: "if I'm unwell it is because I have no residence permit, if I'm unwell it is because I don't earn money, or I don't earn enough money, if I'm unwell it is because I don't know the language yet" as if, having obtained the permit, job and language skills, everything would be solved in life. I relate everything strictly to myself, I cannot think beyond myself as an individual. It is this imposition of dependence that accustoms newcomers to a debilitating form of individualization: you need assistance if you want to survive here, but we will assist you only if you obey; you have to be patient, and you have to be lucky as well. It is important to train "foreigners" to a dividual-individual subjectivation, and to take advantage of that passage from their country to the new one, when previous forms of subjectivation get disqualified. Who knows what do these people carry with their bodies! We, locals, have been trained from the cradle: it's you, you, you and yourself... And now this has to be for the migrant as well: it's you and yourself, or you-and-your-family.

Going back to Freire: to "bank" knowledge, as he says, that is, to deposit knowledge into kids, is a way for them to learn, like animals, how to adapt to their surroundings, to the new territory. Freire (and Elliot, and Rubia of Maiz) propose to place the child in a condition of thinking, talking, sensing, sounding, that intersects with the issues and

desires that are derived from their experiences, in order to develop, together with the experiences and perceptions of the social workers, a pedagogical trajectory.⁴⁵³

You were saying yesterday that it would be good for social workers to be in a favourable “situation” (Freire says that the human being is always a “being in situation”), for them to have a knowledge of the way the “system” functions. I think it is not necessary for them to have this knowledge from the beginning, before doing anything else: this is a knowledge (and not only one) that could (should) be developed together, together with the kids, starting from the encounter of our bodies, and the needs, concerns and desires expressed therein. This knowledge would be plural, mobile, and as such it would always be party to action (but we cannot foresee these actions now...). It would be the knowledge of a militant research.

Something that strikes me in Freire’s pedagogy is the importance of visual materials: photographs, drawings, videos, theatrical representations. Freire calls all of this “representation”. We could also call it “art”. Here is the connection with Elliot, and with the third chapter of Freire’s book. Freire / Ultra-red’s method alights upon a certain experience of “communication”: a communication which is not necessarily verbal, interpersonal, or bound up with a meaning. The sometimes complex, long and detailed procedures that Ultra-red adopt seem to be designed to undo a self-centred subjectivity in the name of a collective communication. But what is “common” here is not such in the sense of a final agreement, of a unitary result, of a homogenization. “Some possibility, otherwise I suffocate!” This is what “art” could bring. The possibility to share something, the possibility of a subjectivity which is not based on the individual, or on the group as a sum of individuals (“la comune”, another popular term when we were kids), a subjectivity open to “silence”, to something passing across our bodies.

[...]

There is no need to set up a program for a “pedagogy of the oppressed”, we can use aspects of a Freirian pedagogy in activities that are already in place, and I will try to do this with my students at Goldsmiths. And I will also try with everybody else.

⁴⁵³ Rubia Salgado, “Learning and Teaching the Hegemonic Language German in the Context of Migration”, in *Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise*, Fall 2010, pp 1-8.

Reading this email might make you think that I am mad. It was also written with a view to appearing in my thesis, and for this reason as well it has a tone that speaks to you, Simone, but also to someone else.

Hugs and kisses, paolo

Eliana, Teo, Maiz, war machine

Kim and Marissa, from the Austrian association Maiz, propose for Summer Drafts a “Cartographic Intervention”, involving the guests of Ex-Gorio, Bolzano’s refugee centre. Maiz is a group of migrant women who started a “non-welfarist” association in Linz, that is, an association whose aim is not to “help” migrant women, but to give them tools to “strengthen” themselves. What does it mean to get stronger? What does it mean to “teach” someone how to get stronger?

Organizations working with migrants usually build a rigid and univocal relationship with them: you get help from us, you depend on us, there is nothing else you can do, no other legal possibility for you apart from waiting upon our help: a place to sleep, food, a working permit. This is the relationship for you, based on a logic of assistance, which implies a form of control, dependency, and manipulation of subjectivity. “What is this for?” says Ravo “Why should I make drawings on a map with you? You are nice people, but soon they will kick me out of here, and I will end up under a bridge. I have no job, I have no money, help me getting a job instead, I don’t want to make any map of Bolzano.” Ravo is an Iraqi painter. On his map of Bolzano he deletes the mountains around and paints a sea with an art gallery on the shore, right opposite the place where Lungomare stands. For his friend Adam, who comes from the African desert, Ravo turns the city into a desert, using a golden felt-tip pen and adding a big inscription: “Sahara [in Arabic characters] – Diserto Bolzano”. At the margins he draws a few camels. Adam tells us he misses the desert and its camels dreadfully. Ravo left Ex-Gorio a week ago and no one knows where he is. Some people at Ex-Gorio rumour that he is now living under a bridge.

What does it mean to give a migrant, or everybody else, tools to get stronger? To get stronger means to get “politically” stronger, it means to “politicize” people, and yourself together with them. But then, what does it mean to politicize? Here is the difference

between Elliot, Maiz, and the workshops usually organized by youth centres, migrant centres, associations, museums: the latter is often entertainment, at best a way for people to express their artistic creativity, to have a nice time together, to get to know some other people, now that the social fabric of the city is rent, now that it has become so difficult to get in contact with other people.

For Maiz, to get stronger means also to become more conscious of your condition as a migrant. This awareness seems to come from another time (from times when Ivan Illich would title one of his books *Celebration of Awareness*). This awareness becomes “politicizing” when it is not fixing you in your condition of migrant, when it is not attached to an identity, when it means to be able to think ourselves and everything else in terms of power relations, exclusions and privileges, but also desires and blockages. This is the sense of the “Cartographic Intervention”: to become aware of the blockages of the city starting out from our own personal experience (that is, starting from the middle), to open up possibilities by imagining how the city could change with the help of pens, colours and scissors.

What do I talk about with you? What can I ask you? I ask you to talk not so much about the injustice of the world, about the opinions you form by reading the newspapers, but about something that is not so easy to put into words: what makes your body sick, what twists your bowels, what makes you suffocate. I have similar stories to tell you and she has some too. What can we talk about together? We talk about our desires, not so much what you need but what you would like. Together with the newspapers, it is Caritas that establishes what you need.⁴⁵⁴ To question all this, we ask ourselves what do we like, what would we love, in excess of any need. What happens when we manage to put this into words, when we discuss this together, when we say these things to each other?

Art and activism – in this “Cartographic Intervention” the affective moments, moments where we are together in a different way, when something passes across us as a dislocating force, as in a silent walk across the city, are reduced to something like a miniature: we have lunch together, we take a walk into town. Kim and Marissa use techniques taken from the Theatre of the Oppressed, but, as with the map-making, mostly in order to raise awareness.

⁴⁵⁴ An international (and catholic) NGO, with a branch in Bolzano. It is the most powerful organization working with migrants in this city (it is the one which gets most of the public contracts).

Maiz's pedagogical strategy seems to be one of the "beside". Maiz began their activity, more than a decade ago, by teaching German to migrant women. Instead of adopting the canonical texts to teach German to foreigners, they set up a reading group, dealing with texts by Derrida and others on topics like hospitality. We teach German to migrants, as an association like ours is supposed to do, but we do something else "beside" (we discuss a notion of hospitality with the context of our experience in a foreign country). Maiz's *Cartographic Intervention* is conceived as one of those courses that associations organize for migrants to establish first contact with the city and the local culture. Besides teaching migrants the geographical layout of the city, Maiz aim to "politicize" them by "teaching" migrant women to perceive themselves and the city in a different way, in such a way that another perception would emerge from the migrants' experience, from the various blockages that migrants find in the city ("what are the places where you have access as a migrant?"). This is a pedagogy of the oppressed that aims at undoing visible and less visible barriers across the urban space. I teach a seminar at Goldsmiths titled "Art historie(s)", and I do something else "besides": I try to relate all the material covered to ourselves, our lives, what is happening to us, and what could possibly happen.

Since she took part in the *Cartographic Intervention*, Eliana keeps saying "Now you will never get rid of me...". She becomes friends with Sadia and Homeira, she sings Brazilian lullabies to Sadia's daughter. At first she talks of migrants as "them". She was born in Brazil, her grandfathers were Italians. When she talks about Lega Nord and Bossi she says: "Yes, 'everybody home!', this is their slogan and this is what I've done. If all the Italians in Brazil would come back here, the peninsula would sink." She tells us how people usually think she is Italian before they hear her accent. After talking about migrants as "them", soon she starts saying "we, migrants", even in public meetings. But not in opposition with "you Italians": she talks about Italian migrants in Brazil, who used to be called "white slaves". After Summer Drafts ends, she decides to close her oversized female clothes shop to do something else, she doesn't know what yet. She tells me of her life in Brazil, she used to be a manager for a bank, she was sent to different branches in different cities in Brazil to sort out difficult situations. "I have always been good at analysing and sorting out conflicts". She would stay in a place for a couple of years, after which she would be sent to another city. "Why don't you do the

course for ‘peace mediators and conflict solutions’ with the Langer Foundation?
Teodora is doing it as well.”

I call Teodora the day after. Teo comes from an Ecuadorian family of left wing (Marxist) politicians. The men of the family, father and brothers, are “public figures”, whilst the women work “behind the scenes”. Teodora coordinates a Network of (mostly migrant but not only) people fighting for the rights of the migrants: the Rete per i diritti dei senza voce. They organize in Bolzano the “First of May”, the European migrants’ strike. They also have been preparing an outline for the Provincial Law for migrants (which the Province, after an initial agreement, will not take in consideration). They operate on a macropolitical level, lobbying in dialogue with politicians; some of them belong to political parties themselves, others are unionists. But when Teodora speaks about the “Rete” her accounts tend towards the “micro”, in the sense that they are about people and their intrigues, enmities, alliances, betrayals... she presents me with a vast drama of macropower where people play out their life, hatred, glory, outrage...

I call Teodora and we talk about Eliana. She understands straight away, I’m surprised to see to what extent she can foresee my ideas. She pushes them further: “I’ll take care of her. I will show her around, different things, different possibilities, she has a very positive energy, we need that, we’ll see together what we can do.” Teodora talks as if Eliana is going to join an army. And Teodora will train her, she will “teach” or show Eliana to become part of a struggle.

This is what I have been thinking lately, to form an army, we are an army already, Summer Drafts as a machine to train fighters. I wish we could get the sense of urgency that was there in some older days when there was an identifiable enemy, when the enemy was identified. To organize ourselves and fight an enemy that is not necessarily a group of people. To revive what could be perceived as coming from another geological era, an intensity of forces.

But this might be Teodora’s aim, to build an army. If an army, united under a single banner and composed by a compact number of soldiers, gets its strength from a concentration of power, and is organized according to a more or less unspoken hierarchy, a war machine gets its strength from its own proliferation, from the fragility of the ties that connect its differential elements, together with the pervasiveness of those

very ties; from its ability to penetrate and get penetrated, always engaging parts of itself with other machines drawn in other directions, in such a way that its image will not always be clearly recognizable. “[It] is like a pure and immeasurable multiplicity, the pack, an irruption of the ephemeral and the power of metamorphosis. [It] unties the bond just as he betrays the pact. [It] brings a furor to bear against sovereignty, a celerity against gravity, secrecy against the public, a power (puissance) against sovereignty, a machine against the apparatus.”⁴⁵⁵ Could Summer Drafts function like this (and maybe still receive funding from the State), in such a way that desire keeps propagating together with the erosion of the State apparatus, together with a disruption of the capitalist machine, together with the sabotage of the “system”?

Micropolitics of groups (David Vercauteren)

For Summer Drafts 2 David Vercauteren runs a three day workshop titled “Micropolitics of Groups”, to which we have invited people from different groups and associations of Bolzano. David, after the breaking-up of the Belgian *Collectif sans ticket*, has written, together with two other members of the group, a book which is also a reflection on the experience of the collective itself: the driving question is that of the life and death of self-organized militant groups. A preliminary answer is that it’s not enough for a group to set strong goals, we need to take care of the life of the group for the group to be sustained, we need to be able to read and deal with the forces it generates, with its roles, blockages and signs. “If the first question seems to be ‘How to decompose the hard segments which striate the body of the group (routine, bureaucracy, power, fixation of roles and of language)?’, it is in virtue of another more exigent and important question: ‘How to affirm and construct new modes of collective existence?’.”⁴⁵⁶ The book is written like a manual, divided into different entries. It is a non-prescriptive manual “poetically” written, combining theory with concrete examples coming from the authors’ experience of years of grassroots activism. The book is a sort of pedagogical toolbox. As when Elliot talks with the kids, there is a variation of registers with David, in the book as in the workshop: easily intelligible elements come together with others more challenging.

⁴⁵⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, “1227: Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine”, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, *op. cit.* p 352.

⁴⁵⁶ David Vercauteren, *Micropolíticas de los grupos*, Traficantes de Suenos, 2010, p 47.

David's workshop has a rigorously regulated format, with a pattern made of different moments repeated every day. At the same time David reacts to us in different ways, he reacts to the group by responding to its process, to the changing forces and intensities of the group. He makes us talk about ourselves, our experiences with groups, and invites us to tell a "situation", that is, a concrete and somehow emblematic episode of the life of a group of which we are part. We then choose together one situation that we would like to discuss at greater length. David re-reads the situation in differing ways, shifting its terms. The initial account of the situation insisted on the divergence of opinions of different people inside a group. Through a series of passages, questions and exercises, David shifts the focus of the "situation" from the stacked dynamics of the discordant members, to an analysis of the obstructions and the deathly mechanisms of the group, and a tracing of its components of transformation. To provide a solution would be another way of foreclosing possibilities, which David intends on the contrary to proliferate.

The last day, when the time starts to run out and people try to pursue a form of conclusion: "this is how we are supposed to read the situation...", "this is what you are supposed to do...". I get upset, I try to explain that this is not the point, that you don't get it, we are not here to interpret the situation and come up with the right solution, that David is trying to give us tools not just to unlock a specific situation, but also to unlock this very group, all of us here! I start repeating myself, for fear that I am not being understood, for fear of not being able to explain myself... David shuts me up. I tremble, I'm livid, I hate you David, I hate you all... this workshop is stirring up quite a lot of stuff.

We have a final round of comments before we leave.

Teodora: "I don't understand what this was all about, this wasn't really useful for me."
I'm gonna strangle you Teodora, how can you say this...

A week later I have lunch with her. "David's workshop made me think a lot."

"Really? What about?"

"Now I try to split every term in two, as we did the other day with 'participation', to understand what else is at stake in what is important for us, to think differently what we are taking for granted."

I write letters to my friends, concerning conversations we held together. Walser too writes letters to his friends and to himself, and he writes again of his walks and their encounters. What does it mean to write like Walser? Can I reflect on my ideas through Walser? What would become of these conversations if I could write them again through Walser?

I go to Paola's place to drink nocino, a liquor made with green walnuts that Paola's mother prepares every year. A "Serata Nocino" is an evening spent together between me and Paola. I want to know what she thinks about Summer Drafts. Paola took part in David's workshop, together with some other people of the Quincho, a "historical" collective of Bolzano, which has been active for twenty years now.

"It was very hard for me to understand the terminology and to follow David, I think I missed 80% of what he said, also because of the translation. In spite of that it was a positive experience."

"Why do you think it was positive?"

"It was good to be there with people from other groups, we sort of all know each other, but it never happens that we can talk together about issues concerning our groups in such an open way: you realize how inter-connected our problems are."

We talk more of Summer Drafts and I say how important for me it is to consider its aftermath, to keep talking with the participants, as a way to follow the threads that emerged in the wake of all that took place in those two weeks.

We talk about Valeria and her inexhaustible energy. She can talk with people for hours and she never seems tired. "Once we were having lunch at my place and my brother was there. Valeria asks him about his job, he works with 'problematic' kids in a youth centre. He tells us that the other day he called the police because one of the kids was smoking a joint. What a stupid thing to do – I think. But I don't say anything because I'm too upset, I really think that this is not only stupid, but wrong and unfair. Valeria starts talking with my brother very calmly, asking question after question and reasoning together with him, making him think and talk for half an hour. I have seen Valeria talking like this many times, but this time it was different, I wished I could talk with my brother in such a way, almost as if this was a pedagogical exercise."

I talk to Paola about Jacques Ranciere's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.⁴⁵⁷ "I read this book recently and I was struck by it. It talks about Jacotot, a teacher of the 19th century, who once made an 'experiment': he taught French to a group of Dutch students without really teaching anything. He gave them a French novel with facing-page Dutch translation, for them to read it by themselves. The task he gave to the students was, at the end of the year, to be able to talk about the novel in French. Jacotot is *ignorant* in the sense that he does not speak Dutch, he cannot communicate with his students. But the Dutch students end up learning French: not by themselves, but with a teacher who asks them to think and talk about a book.

Jacotot continues the experiment and starts teaching piano, painting, maths: all subjects he is *ignorant* of. When he teaches painting, for instance, the point is not to create great masterworks, but to 'emancipate' the students. The student is supposed to draw a head, a picture of a head is in front of her. 'What do you see?' asks Jacotot. The student: 'I see a beautiful head.' The second day Jacotot asks the same question, and the conversation gets a bit longer 'I see a beautiful head with curly hair...' and so on, day after day Jacotot makes his students look, think, talk about what is in front of them, and this is how they will learn to draw."

I don't know anything but I can always ask a question.

It's not that I don't know what I teach: I put myself in the condition not to know, in the position of one who does not know. *Ignorance* is a state that I embrace. Through this ignorance we'll be able to listen: it is "as if" I don't know the answer, I listen to you, to what you say, and not to what you are supposed to say, the measure of which would be a truth that I alone, as the one supposed to know, has access to. I don't have an answer to this, I could come up with answers, but instead I ask you a question. I won't read in your words what I know already, reducing them to what I can understand with my intellect. I ask questions in such a way that they would put myself as well into question. I listen to your words and I face them, with my entire body, not knowing what you are about to say, not knowing who you are. I'm ignorant, but I'm not scared to face words. I will try to understand them, and I will try to let them fall onto my body. I'm ignorant, and I don't know how to judge anymore... But this is not quite Jacotot's ignorance, it has become something else.

⁴⁵⁷ Ranciere, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Stanford University Press, 1991.

“The subject taught is not important in itself, what matters is thinking and talking. Emancipation means to verify the equality of the intellects. The task of the master is to ask the student to keep verifying this equality.”

“Why is this equality so important?”

“Well, first of all, it’s important for me because it makes me think that I’m not stupid, that, if I feel less intelligent than others it is not because I’m stupid, there must be other reasons.”

Paola wrinkles her forehead.

“And I like the idea of being an ignorant teacher, it doesn’t really matter how much I know, what matters are the discussions I have with my students. And to show my ignorance to my students will allow the power relations in class to get reshaped, they will get more power, less authority for me and more power for them!”

Paola wrinkles her forehead even more.

“Another thing I like of this Jacotot is that this equality is not a given truth, it has to be verified all the time, and this verification would be a way for me to work through the laziness and fear I get when it comes to talking with people, and especially to talking in public. Jacotot says that what impedes verification is laziness and fear, and the role of the teacher should be to put the students in the condition of getting rid of laziness and fear.”

“Laziness and fear, yes, but sometimes one also gets tired...” says Paola, “And why should we talk all the time to each other? To verify our intelligence? I don’t quite see that. You like that because you want to proceed like Valeria with your brother?”

“Well, yes, in fact... you’re right. But imagine if everybody would do that all the time, to use our intelligence and our capacity to express ourselves to communicate with each other, to make us think about what we say. There would be much more critical thinking around!”

“Yes, ok, but can you imagine how tiring this would be? Sometimes it’s good to talk just bullshit. And can you imagine a world like this anyway? With this equality thing I see a world of... soldiers of the intellect, or something like that.”

“Yes, I understand... soldiers, that’s interesting... but... to get to the point, I got so excited about this book because it has provoked my desire to talk and think more sharply. It is as if it has opened a door. And also it tells me how to do it. But wait, I tell you more about it.

Reason and will are the emancipating tools of Jacotot, and passion, on the contrary, is a passion for inequality, the inequality upon which the whole educational system is based,

a system that educates people to the inequality of the social system. Think about our experience in the Italian university!”

“Yes, indeed, it was based on inequality, but why put passion together with inequality?”

“Ahh, it must be some 19th century idea... Anyway, Jacotot does not think that everybody is the same. He thinks that it is the social fabric that squeezes the differences between people. There is a whole chapter where Ranciere positions Jacotot’s method in relation to politics. The idea is that we are all different but there is also an equality that can be constantly performed.”

“So, we keep the differences, and we pretend to be equal?”

“No, not really, we exercise an equality of the intellect that can contrast the social inequalities, without reducing our specificities. It is like exercising and experiencing equality, making it happen, whilst knowing and acknowledging that we are all different. So the point is not to actualize this equality, this element we have in common, but to keep alive its possibility. I think...

Ok Paola, to summarize, there are two interrelated points that interest me: the first is that Jacotot’s method is not just a method for teachers, but it can be used by everybody and it takes place inside and outside the institutions. It can be used by the farmer with his son: with such a method the farmer can teach his son to read even if he cannot read himself. Do you know what this means? It means that now I am going to apply this method with everybody, and in fact I have started already (with you).”

“What??” says Paola.

“Yes, we don’t think and speak enough, and I have decided to take up this method as an exercise that I will undergo not only with my students, but with everybody. When we talk we often preclude the use of our intelligence, and from now I want to use it, no fear, no laziness. I will ask more questions to people, like Valeria does.”

“I still don’t understand what you want to get from this. It would be something like being a teacher 24 hours a day, only you are not paid for it.”

“Yes that’s right! But listen, I would also do it not to get bored with people and friends. I have been thinking already about this, I’m tired of being in situations where I have to listen to endless conversations and nod and smile when I actually feel bored, when I would rather talk about something else. And I’m tired of myself listening to people without finding the strength to say ‘you know what, I think you are talking bullshit, and let’s discuss this together.’ I’m fed up with keeping my thoughts for myself and for my dissertation. I want activism in everyday conversations! Everyday conversations as activism! I want an activism of the spoken word! Activism everyday and everywhere!!”

“You scare me, you sound crazy now. And anyway, what kind of activism is this, an activism that comes from your head! And you do it by yourself! What a pitiful activism...”

“Ufff, don’t say that, I have to start from somewhere... You could join me and it would be two of us already.”

“Listen, if we think about so many of our friends, they have stopped using their brain a long time ago, it’s not with this method that you’ll get something out of them. And the world is full of people even worse than our friends.”

“No Paola, I’m convinced. And I will use this method with one person at a time, to make it easier. I have started already, the other day with my brother, I had a fantastic conversation about Dario Fo: he just mentioned him and I made an effort to explain to him all I know about Dario Fo and his political work in the ‘70s. And then with Simone as well, we were talking about Summer Drafts and I asked him about the difference between Elliot’s workshops and those that the boys usually participate in.”

“And so what? How would this relate to Jacotot?”

“Because I wouldn’t have asked that question otherwise, for fear of bothering him. I put myself in the position of wanting to ask questions, and him in the position of having to think and talk.

But let me continue, a second point: the method works ‘beside’ the institution. The beginning of the 19th century was a time of pedagogical experimentation, it was the time after the French Revolution, in which Jacotot had taken an active part. There were many people interested in Jacotot’s method, including important pedagogues and even kings. They adopted his method and used it in schools alongside other methods, they also asked Jacotot to use his method in a military academy.

The method becomes institutionalised and it fails, not because students don’t learn as they should, but because there is no emancipation. To teach the method only to soldiers is already a contradiction, the method should be used by everybody, starting from the farmer and his son.”

“Yes, to use the method in a military academy in the 19th century would be like teaching it in corporations today. That’s quite problematic I would say. What becomes of emancipation and equality in institutions constitutively bound up with inequality and hierarchy?”

“Yes, in this case the institution would take the ‘formats’ rejecting the philosophical basis of the method: a verification of the equality of the intellects that would put hierarchy and privilege in danger. We could say that Jacotot’s method doesn’t work in

its institutionalized form, it doesn't work *inside* the institution, because of the threat it poses to their attendant hierarchies. Jacotot was using his method not inside but *beside* institutions. This means I can use this method myself at Goldsmiths, and I don't need to tell this to anybody, I don't need to make this public, or come to terms with Goldsmiths itself!"

Paola is perplexed. "Here again, all this stays in your head then. It is like a hidden method. As if there would be a separation between the interpersonal level of the method and that of the institution. It doesn't make much sense to me."

"We'll see. And as I told you I will use it in non-institutional contexts as well."

"Are you going to stop people in the street?"

"No, I'll do it with whoever I happen to be with, friends, family, students... and anyone else I come across, and you know what, since I read Jacotot I feel like talking with everybody."

"Good for you, but what are you going to do when you are with more than one person?"

"Nothing for the moment, but when we go out together with the others I often feel out of place, you all talk about things that don't really interest me, kindergartens, Ikea, nappies, hairdressers, I would like so much to talk about something else with all of you, something more... 'engaged' I would say."

"Paolo, if you have an issue with your friends you should just admit this to yourself, instead of talking of Jacotot."

"Can't you see that the two things are not separated?! An issue with my friends is not just a personal issue, it's also... an issue!"

"Yes, yes, an issue with your friends and an issue with yourself! I've noticed how you tend to isolate yourself when you are in a group, and not only when the topic is nappies."

"Well, yes, I guess you're right, but..."

"And are you happy with that? Are you comfortable in such a situation?"

"Well, yes, that's ok, I mean, it depends, not always... But this is not the point, now you talk as if it all comes from a personal problem I have!"

"Paolo, you have to think about what makes you happy, what makes you well."

"I don't care about feeling well! That's not what I want! I will feel well when I will stop trying to feel well! What I want to do is to carry on with Jacotot's experiment! And you just talk about me, too easy!"

"All right, all right, think about your experiment, but you should think about silly things as well, you cannot talk about serious stuff all the time, you also need to laugh, to have

an evening when you can enjoy talking stupidly, and, to tell it all, I think you are losing this, with all those ideas you put in your head.”

“But it’s not that I cannot have a laugh, I can still make a joke, it’s just that a whole evening like this...”

“Listen, our life is hard enough, I work eight hours a day in a fucking office, when I go out I don’t always want to use my brain and talk of serious stuff.”

“Ok Paola, enough, let’s have a laugh now.”

Postilla to this conversation: Jacques / Jacotot’s method is not just a pedagogical method, but also an “activist” method to be used everywhere, inside and outside institutions, to change power relations and therefore society as a whole. This method implies a notion of politics as something concerning human beings (a term that constantly appears in the book) and their relations. People have to acknowledge their presence by verifying their intelligence. This is a politics of presence, a politics where people have to be in each other’s presence, it is a politics based on a community that needs an actual coming together of people in order to exist. We certainly should get together much more often, and perhaps, as Paola suggests, not only to verify our intellects. But I don’t believe human presence is the necessary condition for a “community” to happen and things to change. From Jacotot’s army to Walsler’s war machine: with how many things can we have a conversation?

Molly, joy, schizoanalysis

The day after I still think about the discussion with Paola. I’m still upset. I think that if I write it down in the chapter I will take away the parts where she says that I need some fun. I don’t want stupid fun. I’m going to the station to take a train to Bologna and then Tuscany, I’ll spend some days with my friends. But I don’t feel like going! I would prefer to stay with my computer, I haven’t done anything for the PhD in a whole year, and now that I have time... a holiday.

Whilst waiting for the train Paola’s “fun” re-enters my thoughts together with Valeria’s “joy”: this joy is an important element for Valeria, a vital ingredient in everything she does. It comes from Spinoza, via Deleuze, I think.⁴⁵⁸ I have never looked so much into this Deleuzian Spinoza, mostly because of the opposition between sad affects and

⁴⁵⁸ See for instance Deleuze, *Spinoza, Practical Philosophy*, City Lights, 1988.

joyous affects Spinoza makes: sadness as debilitating and joy as productive – I have tried to understand affection in a different way, away from this opposition that first qualifies them, and then disqualifies “negative” affects. But now that fun comes together with joy, I start thinking that Paola and Valeria might be right, we need fun *as well*, or better, we need fun *at the same time*.

Valeria has been writing about “glitters and bubbles” as a modality for “organizing”.⁴⁵⁹ At first I thought that these glitters and bubbles were a way of saying: look, activism can be and should be “fun”, and that’s how people could get involved in it, it is how things have been unfolding recently, when it comes to political action, at least from Seattle onwards. The example could be Summer Drafts as well, and The Committee for Radical Diplomacy’s intervention, discussed somewhere else: politics goes together with playing and partying.

For the description of Summer Drafts 2 Valeria came up with a differentiation between “entertaining” and “diverting”; *intrattenere e divertire*, in English they can both be translated by “having fun”. To entertain is to have fun without moving, staying where and how we are now, it is a way of going in circle. To divert is to have fun by diverting, turning away, displacing ourselves and other things around us. With a *divertissement* something else takes place besides having fun. It is “as if” we are doing an art project, whilst something takes place, it is as if we have fun, and this fun brings something else together with it.

Moreover, having fun, in the form of entertainment, is like a social requirement, the mainstream modality available for us to come together and be together. I would associate this modality with a smiley neoliberal culture embedded in us: everything has to be all right when it comes to social interaction. More than all right, it has to be fun! The personal problems are for the psychologists, and the general problems are for the TV news. The way of countering this dictatorship of entertainment is not with seriousness, it is by carrying on having fun, but a different kind of fun. We could read a “doubling”, something like a small displacement in the passage from entertaining to diverting. To respond to the Spinozian issue: this diversion would not exclude violent (therefore “negative”) aspects and tones (see especially the example of Summer Drafts 1

459 Valeria Graziano, “Glitters and Bubbles: how to (re)organize in the age of experiential economy?”, unpublished.

and its aftermaths). This is excitement, which is altogether different from the codified entertainment which regulates the danger at the heart of our encounters: it is a diverting joy, something unpredictable and largely indescribable.

Maybe Paola was saying something like: “everybody will run away from you if you don’t have fun.” Because we live in a culture of fun, in spite of everything we are encouraged to appear as living a “happy” life, at work as in our free time. Diverting gets reduced to entertainment when it is programmed, foreseen and indispensable, even in activities like Summer Drafts. If corporations organize fun for their employees, we might use some organized fun for Summer Drafts as well. And which kind of fun do we find in Walser? I have the impression that he is having some sort of fun in his walks, and even in the Institute Benjamenta. It is a dangerous, “mad” fun, one that keeps escaping in every direction. More on this later, as Walser would say.

Toret, together with Valeria, conducts for Summer Drafts a schizoanalytic workshop. After a condensed presentation of schizoanalytic terminology Toret invites the dozen people sitting in circle in Lungomare’s yard to talk about their preoccupations and concerns at work, in institutions, association, in the city of Bolzano. After bombarding everyone for an hour with something that people later described as a chaos, an incomprehensible mess, a burst of machinegun fire, even “a vomit”, people responded fervidly. It was a bit like the prose poem by Baudelaire where the poet beats up a beggar, only to have the beggar return the favour.⁴⁶⁰

In a situation where someone occupies a role that makes of him or her the workshop’s leader, this becomes a strategy to dismantle the distribution of roles therein in general, to destroy the order of our parts, the hierarchy of their setting. For Baudelaire it is a way of becoming “equal”, not by exercising a common intellectual capacity, as in Jacotot, but by exchanging violence onto one another’s bodies. There is a pedagogical element in Toret as well, and more strongly in Baudelaire: the poet’s initiative is a reaction to the reading of “those books in which is treated the art of making people happy, wise, and rich in twenty-four hours”, it is a reversal of putting theory into practice.⁴⁶¹ Baudelaire ends up with a new “theory”, a theory that he learns and at the same time teaches to the poor, a theory that he advises the beggar to put in practice with everyone

⁴⁶⁰ Baudelaire, “Let’s Beat up the Poor!” in Baudelaire, *Twenty Prose Poems*, Cape, 1968.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

else. “Sir, you are my equal! Do me the honor of sharing my purse with you.”⁴⁶² This is a theory and a practice of emancipation, social differences collapse, and not only this, money gets shared! This emancipation is radically different from Jacotot’s: it is not based on ability (Baudelaire admits to having been born delicate and to have little practice in boxing), it is not “equal” in itself since the beggar beats the poet even more violently, it is not based on a common capacity, it is based on something outrageous, unacceptable, indecent, ridiculous, insane (crazy Toret).

I beat you up, I dispatch towards you a (seemingly?) incoherent burst of words, in such a way that, as Baudelaire does, I ruin my respectable appearance of walking bourgeois, of a competent teacher, I drag you down with me, and your mechanisms of self-protection, the fixity of your identity, your “blockages” (momentarily) collapse: you are not ashamed of talking anymore, you are not afraid, you are compelled to do that, you fire back. And you are not so worried about the way you sound. The experience ceases to be one of verifying intellectual capacities in accordance with a given standard and through a given criteria.

After the first meeting, Toret asks Valeria and me: “what do you want to do now? I want to prepare the next session in such a way that will be useful for all of you.” We would like to carry on with the discussion initiated the day before and try to set the basis for the formation of a group, or better still a “gang” as Toret and Valeria call it, which would possibly carry on discussing and organizing things in Bolzano. Toret asks everybody to write on a piece of paper both a “desire” and a “blockage”, without further specification, the previous session works as a ground for this task to be carried out. We then tell desires and blockages in turn, and Valeria and Toret “read” them again, but in a different way, turning what was initially expressed as a personal issue or wish into something that multiplies, proliferates, starts touching all of us here. They transform the personal into something that has to do with all of us because it has to do with how things function today, with the functioning of a larger machinery, of capitalism, society as such. They connect micro and macro, personal blockages with the functioning of wider machines, personal desires with the possibility of unlocking those blockages and think, sense, perceive, desire, in a different way.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*

“In schizo-analysis we should give free rein to Oedipalizing representations and paranoid-fascist representations, in order the better to counter their tendency to block the fluxes, and to start things going again in a kind of machinic rush.”⁴⁶³

Teaching as schizoanalysis, teaching as a therapy, a self-help group therapy without a self. We are all sick, intoxicated by capitalism. Bifo has written many pages describing this intoxication and its effects.⁴⁶⁴ I will use the material of my seminar to ask questions to the students, to make them think and talk about their jobs, their lives at the university, and I will try to link up personal accounts to a form of collectivity, with something that exceeds us.

I meet with Molli, she is back from London as well, we decide to go to our ex favourite bar, the *Sonderbar*, as in the old days. Molli and I have known each other since the first year of university in Italy, we decided together to move to London right after completing our studies, and so we did, and we are still there. And now we are back in Bolzano together, with a lot to tell one another. She asks me about Summer Drafts and I talk about the schizoanalysis workshops: Molli had recently choreographed a brilliant performance piece dealing with schizophrenia and love. I like her work as a choreographer, also because everything is drawn from her own personal experience, as in the case of this last performance. I talked to her about Deleuze and Guattari, I gave her texts of Guattari to read, and a copy of *Matti da slegare* as a birthday present.⁴⁶⁵ Talking with her of schizophrenia helps me understanding why the “schizo” is so important for Deleuze and Guattari, and why it is important for me. The schizophrenic has the capacity of going beyond herself, beyond the confinement of the individual. I talk about schizo, Molli talks about schizophrenia. She tells me about the case of a schizophrenic girl sitting on a chair and losing the sense of boundary between herself and the chair where she is sitting. It is here, in this losing the boundary of the self that schizo and schizophrenia meet (Walser as diagnosed schizophrenic and Walser as a schizo writing machine). What happens once the boundary that encloses the self within itself is lost? Which kind of losing, or loosening, is that of Deleuze and Guattari’s “schizo”?

⁴⁶³ Guattari, “Towards a Micro-Politics of Desire” in Guattari, *Molecular Revolution*, Penguin, 1984, p 102.

⁴⁶⁴ See for example, Franco Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, Minor Compositions, 2010.

⁴⁶⁵ Marco Bellocchio, Silvano Agosti, Sandro Petraglia, Stefano Rulli, *Matti da slegare*, 1975.

“Schizophrenia has to be cured with medicines. Sometimes people in need of them refuse to take medicines because they reject the diagnosis. There is a stigma surrounding schizophrenia. I want to use the performance to make schizophrenia known, to counter the stigma. It’s important to publicly talk about schizophrenia, it’s still hard for schizophrenics to come out, to be accepted...” says Molli.

“But to some extent we become all schizophrenic, this is what Deleuze and Guattari say in their book *Anti-Oedipus*. Capitalism is making all of us ‘schizophrenic’, in the sense that it robs us of our certainties, our stability, our grounding. Everything goes fast, we are constantly bombarded by new stimuli, our life is rendered more and more precarious. Precarious jobs, precarious friendships, precarious families, a precarious place to live, from a house that we’ll never own, to a city that is never really our city. Precarious identities. All this has to do with schizophrenia: losing ourselves as a point of stability. This can be painful, as it is (although the intensity differs) for a schizophrenic. You lose the sense of self and you get carried away by everything and everyone, in such a way that everything you do, including your relationship with people, becomes fluctuating and often inconsistent. All this is not necessarily terrible in itself, “precarity” is what social movements in the ‘70s were looking for, they were experimenting with a liberation of desire, and for desire to be liberated, or at least loosen, bonds (with your job, your city, your family, your friends, your partner...) have to be questioned. Precarity is not good or bad in itself, it is when it becomes a tool of capitalism that it is pernicious for our lives.

To face what Deleuze and Guattari call “deterritorialisation” you try to protect yourself, you take care of yourself as an individual, you take care of your identity, you try to reground yourself. There are different ways of caring and different things you can take care of. Taking care is to some extent what capitalism itself asks us to do: to take care of yourself, of your interest, of your career. On one side you have to be extremely flexible and available, on the other you have to exercise some control over yourself, and at the same time you have to be controlled. A ‘schizophrenic’ is useless for capitalism unless he or she takes medication. The capitalist mechanism doesn’t let us go entirely, we become “schizophrenic” but in a way that serves the purpose of the capital, we become flexible, mobile, multitask. And we somehow hold together, each of us for ourselves, individuals in competition with other individuals, or part of an (individual) team in competition with other teams. What Deleuze and Guattari suggest is to push this deterritorialization further. It’s not a matter of going back to our lost communities, to

our lost identities, to our lost certainties, but to go further away, in unexpected directions, away from the framework of the capital, with its axiomatic (profit, accumulation, private property...), with all its micro and macro blockages, from the judgements I produce for myself as a way of self-control that prevent me from doing things I would like to do but I do not even dare to begin to desire, to the borders that control migrants, preventing them from freely moving around the globe. So, the point is not to become schizophrenic but to become schizo. Schizo is not a person, it's a way of desiring, a way of using our possibility, of connecting in different directions, at different speeds, with different elements, without reducing this possibility to a function of the capitalist mechanism. So, the cure to our madness is not to return sane, but to become even more mad, mad in a different way. To 'lose control', to repeat our madness, to perform it all over again, in such a way that capitalism itself is permeated with these destabilising movements. This collapse of capitalism might be seen as a side effect, but I think it's vital to always take it in consideration. Sorry Molli, this was perhaps overly long, but this is what it takes to begin to understand."

"But for capitalism it is a question of binding the schizophrenic charges and energies into an axiomatic that always opposes the revolutionary potential of decoded flows with new interior limits. [...] Hence schizophrenia is not the identity of capitalism, but on its contrary its difference, its divergence and its death. Monetary flows are perfectly schizophrenic realities, but they exist and function only in the immanent axiomatic that exorcises and repels this reality."⁴⁶⁶

Molli has an extraordinary capacity for configuring bodies in movement and space. A choreographer and a dancer, she also teaches dance to autistic children in schools, and to a group of women in a mental asylum. I would like to see her teaching. I wonder how Jacotot would teach dance to a group of women in an asylum.

... At some point the whole stage becomes a brain, shining with minute electric charges. We become part of this brain, which opens up through the screams of a piercing voice...

I convince Molli to come with me to nanopolitics. Nanopolitics is a "London-based open group of people (activists, researchers, artists, therapists) interested in collective processes at the intersection between the political, therapeutic and creative. We

⁴⁶⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti Oedipus*, p 246

experiment with body and performance related methods and try to translate those to different contexts and struggles.”⁴⁶⁷ I also wanted Molli to come for her to “become activist” together with me, as a way of taking care of a friendship. “We are becoming activists Molli!” I say after the first session. We laugh.

For a short time, a few years ago now, I went to a psychologist recommended by a friend. I have never been to a “good psychologist” and, besides looking for help, I was curious to see how a good psychologist works. It works in a strange way, very differently from the theoretical texts I have been using for a while now, not only to write the PhD but also as “therapeutic” tools. I have been trying to get over myself, whereas this psychologist tries to make me more aware of myself. He is trying to make me work better inside the world, function better inside society, inside a certain world and society, a world made of individuals thinking for themselves and about themselves, individuals proud of themselves, who love themselves, and demand for themselves what is right for themselves (‘because I’m worth it!’).

This good psychologist had also his own techniques, he used to attack me saying that I was depressed, that I needed help, that I should split up with my boyfriend... I took it as a game we were playing, but this is a game that can lead to dependency: yes, you are right, I need you, I cannot make it without you... Before realizing all this I talked to Molli about the good psychologist. That was a bad idea.

We are at the *Sonderbar* drinking beer, and when I tell Molli about Toret’s schizoanalytic workshop, she says “Oh, yes, this is like D [the good psychologist] when he does group therapy. Then D is like a schizoanalyst as well.”

“No Molli, he is not!”

I have to keep calm, otherwise I will ruin the conversation. Think about Jacotot, think about his method, we are thinking and talking together, it’s an exercise, I need to be able to explain Molli what I mean, how schizoanalysis works.

“No Molli, D is not a schizoanalyst, let me try to explain this.”

I look calm as usual, but she knows that I’m not and she starts getting annoyed as well. I carry on talking about Summer Drafts.

...

Ok this round is gone, I’m exhausted, call me a lazy Jacotot, but it is better to carry on another time. We talk about our love life. I try to attempt a schizoanalytic reading of her

⁴⁶⁷ <http://nanopolitics.noblogs.org/>

love life, without having it planned. She understands what I'm trying to do and she looks at me suspiciously. Ok, let's talk about something else.

Two days after we are supposed to meet again. I call her in the afternoon, she is rehearsing her new piece amongst some ruins in a hill outside Bolzano.

"How romantic" I say.

"Oh yes. Listen, I don't think I'll be able to make it tonight, I want to carry on here for some time. I'm scratched and bruised all over, it's like being Franko B without a public, and on top of that I'm destroying what is left of these ancient ruins."

"Molli, you are a force of nature. Let's see each other another time, we should carry on with the conversation we had the other day."

"Ok. I was thinking that you were rather critical of me the other day."

"Was I?"

"Yes, you were a bit harsh with me."

"Oh, well, I noticed that you got slightly annoyed a few times. That's why we should meet, there are more things that we should talk about."

"When shall we meet then?"

"You tell me, I have no plans for the next few days."

"Really?"

"Yes, I'm losing my friends one by one, no one can stand me anymore."

"I'm not surprised, I told you, you have become so harsh. Let's see if you can at least still have me as a friend."

"Yes, let's see."

APPENDIX 11: **Carla, unpower**

We have been waiting for Carla to come to London for a long time, and now she is here, to lead a workshop as part of nanopolitics. Body Mind Centering is the discipline Carla practices, she uses it in Paris with people affected by HIV. Carla is beautiful, it must be her long dark hair, the way she moves, the tone of her voice. For the first exercise we lay on the ground, Carla talks, but she does not give instructions, she doesn't really tell us what to do and how to move our bodies, her words are not entirely meaningful, they *suggest* rather than *mean* something, they come towards us, and we feel like moving towards them, to reach the void beneath their signification, each of us in a different way.

At the beginning of the exercise I look at the others, it is not about getting it right and doing the same thing all together, everybody seems to follow a different path, as though the voice that guided us was more than one.

What we actually do is try to “map a different geography of our bodies”, as Carla puts it. We trace a different map in the sense that we learn to perceive, think, feel our bodies differently. Or rather, our body really becomes something else, its interiorized hierarchy changes, the umbilical zone becomes the living centre of the body, the head is now another limb, it moves like an appendage, the coccyx turns into a tail, into another limb that we lost long ago, and that we now regain in this becoming animal, becoming starfish, becoming octopus. Maybe this strange term “body mind centering” refers to the shift of these two familiar entities, body and mind, to the possibility of moving them around, replacing one with the other, so that they lose their familiarity. Carla asks us to imagine the navel becoming a mouth, she says “imagine...”, then she doesn’t say it anymore, my navel is opening, I can feel it, a living cavity opens in my belly. I am scared, but just for a moment.

I do still think somehow, I use my brain during this exercise, but this is not the “centre” of my body anymore, other parts of it begin to emerge, consolidate, they gain a different consistency, as if they would think by themselves, as if part of my leg becomes like a head with a brain: it starts pulsating, it is alive, I can feel it, it is thinking, I don’t know how else could I put this. My body loses its outline, my limbs, including the newly acquired, elongate in space. My body becomes limitless, possibly infinite, or at least this is how it feels. It feels, because in a way it is not really me feeling, it is the body itself. Now our bodies touch each other, grazing, it is as if part of my leg, my foot, is something like a hand, a sensitive piece of flesh which is not quite mine.

With the following exercises we explore the “tuning” which gives the workshop its title. Our bodies tune with each other: in itself the movements and gestures we make appear, again, entirely simple, I lean my hands onto someone else’s body, for example. But what we do is something else than just leaning. Carla talks about the bodily tissues behind the skin, about what remains unseen of our bodies. She uses anatomical knowledge, an anatomy far more complex than the one we’ve learned in primary school. Carla asks us to touch and sense and affect the connective tissues of someone else’s body. It is not just imagination that we use, she talks about the different tissues

our bodies are made of and tells us how, because of the way the body is constituted at a “nano” level, a pressure on its surface becomes a pressure on its interior (but Carla never talks in terms of an interior and exterior of a body). “Anatomy is a kind of fiction,” says Carla, and it is also the “real”, solid base for these exercises. I really “yield” to someone else’s body with my own. I perceive the other body alive, moving, palpitating. Then I don’t perceive it anymore, I forget that my hand is pressing someone else’s shoulder, I forget someone’s hand touching my leg. My body becomes limitless in every direction, its shape changes not only outwards but also inwards, it is made of moving fractals. Different bodies become tuned, conjunctions with other bodies takes place.

Whilst Carla explains to us what connective tissues are, I start thinking vividly of something apparently unrelated to what we are doing. I think about the way I tend to position myself in relation with others, using something like a judgement scale that works according to different parameters. I could name the most important parameter I use as “intelligence”, others would be the “ability to express yourself cogently” or “theoretical knowledge”. They are important for me because I feel they are not very developed in myself. The scale of judgement with its parameters produces a sort of web of power where I position myself and the others in front of me. I feel, speak, act differently according to the position I end up occupying on the scale. This is surely an abstract and schematic model of the way I relate with people in front of me. There is something almost “nano” in this mechanism that makes me feel inadequate most of the time, in the sense that it is something that happens largely below a threshold of consciousness (but consciousness and the unconscious are not two separated spheres with a threshold in between). Maybe it is through thinking and experiencing the nano dimension of the relationship between our bodies that I was able to perceive and think what is for me an everyday but internalised mechanism of relation. All this, then, is not unrelated with the connective tissues Carla was talking about, she was precisely offering us, with her anatomical explanations, a very different model of relationality. And it is a very different model of relationality that we are experiencing here in this workshop.

“What disturbed us is that in renouncing judgment we had the impression of depriving ourselves of any means of distinguishing between existing beings, between modes of existence, as if everything were now of equal value. But is it not rather judgement that presupposes preexisting criteria (higher values), criteria that pre-exist for all time (to the

infinity of time), so that it can neither apprehend what is new in an existing being, nor even sense the creation of a mode of existence? Such a mode is created vitally, through combat, in the insomnia of sleep, and not without a certain cruelty towards itself: nothing of all this is the result of judgement.”⁴⁶⁸

After the workshop I talk with Carla. We talk about Walser, I tell her that I tried to use her article on Walser for my dissertation.⁴⁶⁹ I ask her “How would you relate what we have done today with Walser? I am trying to establish a connection but I’m not really able to, although I think there might be one.” Carla thinks for a moment, then she says something like: “I use Walser as an ethical example, in my everyday life, in my relation with others... BMC works on a different scale, on a somatic level.” Right, but Carla is still thinking about the question, and me too. She already gave another possible answer during the session: BMC, or at least Carla’s BMC, is a way to “multiply our capacity of perceiving and sensing”. And I think that what we’ve done here is a kind of desubjectivation, a training for us to get away from ourselves, from ourselves as subjects, away from our bodies as we have learned to perceive them, with their hierarchy of uprightness, the thinking head above, closest to the sky and furthest from the earth (Bataille’s “Pineal Eye” could be read as a sort of BMC desubjectifying exercise).⁴⁷⁰ Not only this, such desubjectivation implies a learning to tune with other bodies, and this tuning is what replaces the hierarchy (of judgement) that regulates our relationships. “Un-power” becomes the practice of undoing the known (hierarchical) modality of power relations by using somatic knowledge to develop other (non-hierarchical) modalities: modalities of tuning, as constitutively open negotiations without pre-existing parameters. This is where Carla’s BMC and Walser come together: in the undoing of the visible (preconceived) limits of our bodies, and in a practice of tuning – a relation with other bodies and their surroundings that is not regulated according to hierarchical structures. Our bodies lose their known perimeters, and our relations (not just between bodies) lose their habitual parameters.

The body becomes something else, something other than “human”, with all the impositions that “humanity” carries with it. We develop a different relation amongst

⁴⁶⁸ Deleuze, “To Have Done with Judgement”, in *Essays Critical Clinical*, *op. cit.*, pp 134-135.

⁴⁶⁹ Carla Bottiglieri, “Un-power”, in Manuela Zechner, Paz Rojo, Anja Kanngieser eds., *Vocabularies*, Amsterdam, self-published, 2008, pp. 141-151.

⁴⁷⁰ Bataille, “The Pineal Eye” in Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, University of Minnesota Press, 1985, pp. 79-90.

what we usually perceive as our mind, with its capacity of thinking rationally, our body as perceiving things from the inside or the outside, ourselves as both thinking and sentient, and other bodies, other things around us. We can think with the body and sense with the mind, this implies a recomposition of our bodies according to a different geography, a geography unknown to our selves. The body becomes other than what we see with our eyes, we start to perceive it and perceive everything else in many other ways. We experience the possibility of composing something anew using our bodies together, a merging of different bodies: the possibility of collectively being something else, something else than the sum of ourselves, something else than a unitary fusion of bodies. We tune, we develop an ability of organizing forces, intensities, and all that is on the verge of the perceptible, without referring to pre-established or interiorized structural patterns and systems of value.

Hence, these exercises are a somatic training for a becoming Walser, for the learning of a different relation, a different tuning with all there is around, beneath, across and beyond the surface of a skin delimiting myself.

This is a different desubjectivation from the one we experience every day. Today desubjectivation more often than not takes a destructive form of proliferating tensions and pressures that we are compelled to endure at work, at the university, in the street, at home, everywhere. The outlines of our unitary and coherent selves are constantly threatened, but in a way which is oppositional to ourselves, so that we are forced to reinstate ourselves as individual entities. This is a sort of false, or sickening (Deleuze and Guattari would say “cancerous”) desubjectivation, that ends up stiffening the voided shell of our paranoid bodies: it’s all about myself as a Subject, whether I defensively assert something of myself in the face of this process or have to give way to its force (to what extent can I integrate myself in a mainstream, or can I protect myself from devastating pressures).

But desubjectivation here, with Carla and nanopolitics, is something that overcomes the opposition between an inside and an outside myself: I lose myself and I gain everything else, or the possibility of multiple conjunctions. This other desubjectivation is always multiple, plural, never individual. This is the important difference, between a desubjectivation of the individual, made to become flexible, fragmented, fractured, but tied all the more fully to itself (at best formally connected, through a networking

system, with other subjects), and a desubjectivation that is a becoming plural, a multiplication, a practice of conjunctions where everything tends to move away, in different directions, from what it is.

Suddenly, after two years, the term nanopolitics acquires its sense. It is to make politics starting from a nano level, as a training of our bodies, as a learning which our bodies won't forget when outside this room at Queen Mary, because here there is more at stake than a remembering mind. Our bodies have learned something, the possibility of being different, of becoming something else together with other bodies. They will carry this possibility with them, in different situations (at work, at the university, in the street, at home, everywhere). How is all this political? It is not political in itself, because politics is never just nano, in isolation (nor micro, nor macro). But it is political in as much is learning how our bodies can organise themselves, how they can affect and be affected, in a process that always implies a sabotage, a disruption, a violence that hinders the functioning of the dominant system that has silently shaped us. From this ground we can pursue this experimentation from the nano to the micro and the macro, and this is the challenge we are taking up.

I say goodbye to Carla in front of the pub, but then we realize we are going to the same bus stop, and so we walk together and we chat a bit more, and when my bus comes we say goodbye again, but this time something else happens, as if, after this second hug, it would be less easy for our bodies to get apart. I go on the bus, looking back, waving my hand, she smiles, the door shuts but I can still feel something like a line drawn between our bodies. This perception vanishes soon. I sit down, the bus leaves, tears start pressing at my eyes.

APPENDIX 12: New Cross drift, rehearsal of a demo

Together with a group of PhD students from different departments I organise the annual London/Berlin/Copenhagen joint symposium at Goldsmiths. The call for papers for this symposium is usually written by a member of staff, but this time we conceive it and organize it ourselves. We decide to have a call for activities rather than a call for papers. We want to address the current "crisis" of academia, whilst opening the symposium towards the outside of Goldsmiths, to people living in the New Cross neighbourhood. I

have been living in New Cross for many years now, and I still don't know my neighbours. For some time I have been thinking of doing something in the neighbourhood, apart from cycling back and forth to Goldsmiths, but I wouldn't really know how to start. The symposium becomes an occasion to find ways into the neighbourhood.

LONDON SYMPOSIUM / 3-4-5 MARCH 2011

Collective Futures

Organising Critical Experience

The idea for this symposium emerges from the current wave of struggles against educational cuts in the United Kingdom. The present crisis does not only affect the British educational system and British society as a whole. It derives from broad socio-economic changes imposed by global capitalism everywhere. Hence, the proposition of using the space of the next joint symposium to discuss issues and explore possibilities that concern not only London, but also Berlin and Copenhagen.

We consider it important not to limit ourselves to a debate about cuts, percentages and financial amendments. The primary targets of the British government and the transnational powers beyond it are spaces where critical thinking is developed (see for instance the closure of the Continental Philosophy Department at Middlesex University). It is the life of what we call here 'critical experience' that we want to address together in this symposium. The aim of the symposium is not to discuss how to save existing academic structures as they are, or how to go back to the good old days of academia, but to think and experiment collectively new (future) forms of production of 'critical experience'.

We use the term 'critical experience' to insist on the need to recognise that what we do, as academics that do not seek refuge in the crumbling (or reinforced - depending on the viewpoint) ivory tower of academia, goes (or should go) beyond a purely intellectual exercise. The way we operate is and should be both intellectual and practical, personal and collective, rational and affective, academic and non-academic. And this is what the three joint symposia in 2011 propose: to open the intellectual to the practical, the personal to the collective, the rational to the affective, the academic to what is not academia, to what is "public", or has to be re-appropriated or reconstituted as such (as common).

The plans to further privatise academia have triggered a variety of self-organized activities, not only in London, but across Europe. These activities are not confined to the classroom, nor are they limited to protests and demonstrations. Discussions take place in the streets, teach-ins are organised in occupied libraries, exhibitions are curated in occupied art galleries, lectures are happening in banks and shops. These collective forms of thinking and acting question conventional understandings of thought as an individualistic and purely academic activity.

During the Unplugged Humanities symposium in Berlin last November we already developed various experiences responding to the current crisis of academia, and some of these experiences are continuing. The London symposium does not invite participants to analyse or emulate the self-organised activities which have recently emerged in London in order to appropriate and exploit their creativity and secure the ultimate innovative academic model. The struggles call for the organisation of critical experience beyond the managerial parameters that nowadays administer higher education. We invite the

participants of the London symposium to respond to this call by proposing activities to experiment with the transformative capacities of collective critical engagements.

CALL FOR ACTIVITIES

The London symposium makes a “call for activities” in order to participate. These activities can be proposed individually or collectively, but a collaboration of some sort, between academics, and between PhD students and people outside academia, is encouraged.

We welcome different formats of activities:

- Activities engaging with public spaces / spaces outside academia, and their ‘inhabitants’ or communities
- Workshops developed using the theory we use in our research (putting theory into practice).
- Performances (including facilitation of a critical discussion)
- Invitation of guest speakers/presenters and facilitation of discussion (again the guests do not need to be academics)
- Collective presentation of papers
- Screenings (including the facilitation of a discussion)
- Games (including the facilitation of a discussion)

I feel pretty much by myself in this, the meetings with the other PhD students are disappointing, everybody is tired, late, distracted, it’s difficult to discuss anything beyond mere practicalities, like what to eat, where to get the kettle, and so on. At some point another PhD student says to me: “Why do you take this symposium so seriously, it’s just a bunch of tutors and PhD students!” meaning, I guess “This is not going to change much in our careers, why bother.”

Sleepless nights, this is not very Walserian, what is far away from Walser is the way we organize this symposium. Walserian might be the “drift” in itself, but we are rather unprepared to the encounters with the passersby. What could it mean to organize ourselves as Walser? I’m not by myself, I’m not walking in the Swiss forest, we are in academia, our brains are engaged in a hundred other things. It is the challenge of shifting from one to many, and this shift didn’t really take place, it was me who was seen as the one who was putting more time, motivation, energy into this. How to let go, and let go together, in such a way that the “Institute” won’t suffocate us?

After several sleepless nights, when the symposium approaches and it seems things are coming together, the others get excited as well. The activity I propose together with Manuel is titled “New Cross Drift / Rehearsal for a Demo”. Improbable coexistence, we put together a drift, a wandering around the Goldsmiths’ neighbourhood, with a demonstration, a public act of protest of people that want to be seen and heard. This is

actually a *rehearsal* of a demo, we do it “as if” this would be a demo, which by no means precludes the fact that a form of real contestation is at stake. I try to get in contact with groups of people organizing themselves in the neighbourhood, but I do that pretty much by myself, together with Marianne: I go to some LACA meetings (Lewisham Against Cuts Alliance), to an occupation of the New Cross Library – one of the many public libraries the Council is going to shut down, to a meeting of Goldsmiths Fight Back, where I don’t understand much of what is discussed. We are looking for people to guide us around New Cross, to visit different places, maybe community centres, places where something could happen as part of a “collective future” (this is the title we give to the symposium).

We start with a placards-making workshop, facilitated by students of the Art Committee of the Goldsmiths Library Occupation. We ask people to bring their favourite quotations, taken from books, songs, films... we turn the quotations into slogans for the placards. Who is going to come to this drift/demo? Students and professors from London, Copenhagen and Berlin, and hopefully people living in New Cross: we stack up fliers everywhere around Goldsmiths inviting people to join us.

There are not many people actually making placards at the workshop, many students and professors look at the absurd slogans from afar, perplexed: “Peel me a grape!” “Total Orgasm” “What a damp!”, sentences *detourned* mostly from Hollywood films and songs. We start inside the college and we start from quotations, a classic academic “weapon”, but soon we walk the streets, demonstrating. Against what? This is the question that many passersby ask us in the street.

I run to the office to make some photocopies for the drift and when back the small group has already left the building. I can see them across the road heading towards New Cross Library. A beautiful sight! They are few, quietly sticking to each other, raising their placards still dripping paint, amongst the roar and smoke of cars, vans and motorcycles. James Holland from LACA and Les Back from the sociology department lead the walk. James explains the situation of this and other public libraries in Lewisham and talks about the cuts in the neighbourhood. Les Back brings us to several places where struggles happened in the 20th Centuries: he reads passages from Virginia

Woolf, Paul Gilroy and Sebald, he relates the different sites to “bombing”, he talks about British culture as a culture of bombing.⁴⁷¹

This rehearsal, this demonstration that is not quite a demonstration, certainly produces a different logic on the ground. It is a logic of the fragility of a masquerade that is real, as real becomes Walser, together with the Robber, his walking double. Are we pretending or is this really a demonstration? Are those really placards or just a rewriting of cheap novels that flood the bookshops and which Walser reads, of cheap films that we watch online in the evening to be able to fall asleep? Is this really us sticking up posters on street lights and traffic lamps, talking with random people on the street? What happens in the refraction produced by this rehearsal for an event which may in fact never take place? This is what we ask whilst handing out the leaflets advertising this rehearsal for a demo.

APPENDIX 13: **Al contadin non far sapere**

9th of December 2010, around 3pm, after a seminar with my students at Goldsmiths, I join my friends at the demonstration in Parliament Square. I go there from Goldsmiths with one of my students, we walk arm in arm, acting as if we were tourists, as a light-hearted couple admiring the buildings in Whitehall, indifferent towards the police all along the road, and laughing, enjoying this silly performance. We just had a seminar where we discussed the current planning of the demolition of the UK education system, the devastation of places like Goldsmiths, where the public funding will be cut 100% and the fees raised to £9000 per annum. The universities that are going to be privatized completely seem to be those where what is asked to students is not so much to collect knowledge, but to think critically.

Today, for the first time in a seminar that I facilitate, Korean and Chinese students are those who talk the most. I have been asking myself for a long time what makes it so hard for Korean and Chinese students to take part in the seminar’s discussions. It might

⁴⁷¹ We read Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, Random House, 2004, pp. 26-28 at the home of Barnes Wallis, inventor of the bouncing bomb; Virginia Woolf, *Thought on Peace in an Air Raid London*, Penguin, 2009, p. 5, by the 'bomb print' where a V2 rocket fell during World War II killing 200 people; Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, Unwin Hyman, 1987, pp. 102-103 at the site of the New Cross Fire. See also Les Back, “Trust Your Senses?: War, Memory and the Racist Nervous System”, *The Senses and Society*, Volume 6, Number 3, November 2011 pp. 306-324.

be a language problem, it might be a gender issue... today Korean students give some answers themselves: “every time we have to talk in public we are scared, to talk in public means fear for us, and this is because we have been repressed for so long and so heavily, our grandfathers were killed by the police, our families persecuted”... “A conversation like the one we have here could not take place in a Korean university”... “I was happy to see so many books written by radical thinkers in the Goldsmiths Library, you cannot find them in Korean Universities”... “I have the impression that the UK university will become what the Korean university is already, a place where you pay a lot of money just in the hope to find a job afterwards.”

We say how university in the UK already functions like a shop where the student is a customer: she knows what she wants and is supposed to complain if she does not get it. The student/customer wants to bring something home, she takes notes, she accumulates knowledge, and measures carefully how much she gets in exchange for the money she pays. The marketization of the university is also this: you enter the shop, you get something called knowledge, you exit the shop, most of the time you don't find a job, but you are supposed to feel enriched by this accumulation of accountable knowledge, enriched, and most of all self-assured and self-content: nothing has happened (if, once in the shop, you start feeling a sort of unease, a crumbling of the notes held in your hands, you shouldn't waste time and write a complaint).

We arrive in the square, this demonstration seems rather different from the previous one, a month ago, that was overflowing with joy, colours, sounds. Everything here seems dark, there are a few fires scattered around the square, the atmosphere is tense, but I'm happy to see my friends, we drink a hot cognac that I brought in a thermos, and after half an hour we decide to go somewhere warmer. We head towards the ICA, but the street is blocked by a line of policemen. “Go through Whitehall” a policeman says “you can exit there.” We go to Whitehall and there are even more police blocking the street. We then go back to the policeman we spoke with before, saying that Whitehall is blocked as well. “Yes, it was blocked, but now it's open.” We go to Whitehall again, but there is no way to go through. We start realizing that the policemen are lying to us. We try the tube station but it's closed as well. “Are we in a kettle already?” I say smiling to my friends. I'm sort of joking, they cannot kettle thousands of people into such a huge square, right? I brought with me hot cognac and plenty of warm clothes

because people were talking about kettles the day before at Goldsmiths, but I didn't really think I was going to use them, double socks, double scarf, double jumper.

We spend some time thinking what to do, trying to go from a place to another. With an iPhone we read in the Guardian website that, yes, the whole square is blocked, but they let out whoever wishes to join the candle march in Embankment. But this is just another lie. I'm walking around, trying to warm up, and I see someone with a covered face walking fast towards a boy and punching him in the face. The boy screams, he comes towards me crying "my eye... it's burning..." I don't know what to do, I don't understand what's going on. There are some guys going around the square, randomly punching people on the face. This is the first act of violence we witness. The only way I can make sense of this is that these guys are not protesters, and they are paid by someone to be here and punch people at random. The violence has started after the kettle was made, and not before, and it was not started by the protesters, but by whoever has organized this nightmare. Because minute after minute, hour after hour, this is becoming more and more a nightmare, something like a horror movie. The police repeatedly charges the crowd, the crowd runs away, some people are bleeding. We are enclosed in a place where anything can happen to us, we are forced by the police to be exposed to a violence organized by whoever gives orders to the police, in a space that straight away makes me think about what Giorgio Agamben calls "camp", a space which is constructed both inside and outside the law, a space where we are stripped "bare", in the sense that we can be freely killed without this killing being considered a crime.

But soon I think about something else, this is not just a "state of exception", there is something more at stake: this looks like the set of a Hollywood movie, an apocalypse movie, something like John Carpenter's *Escape from NY*, but with no escape. It is dark now and a helicopter is flying over the square projecting a beam of light downwards, but the light is not really illuminating anything, the helicopter is just part of a horrifying choreography, of a staging where we are enforced actors of a drama that will soon appear on the TV news. A TV horror movie where the protesters will be the "protagonists", smashing windows, throwing bricks, lighting fires, destroying an entire square. But what on the TV screen will look like a chaos provoked by a huge number of uncontrollable protesters, is in fact entirely and carefully planned and organized by someone else, by whoever gives orders to the police around us and to the disguised

mercenaries amongst us. The day after the police will say that nothing of this would have happened if the protesters would have followed the established route. But it was the police who blocked all the streets and led everybody into Parliament Square. Now the smashing of windows is coming near to us and we can see better how it “works”: whilst people smash on the ground floor, on the upper floors the windows open and someone takes photographs of the spectacle below. This is like being part of a film that, at the same time, is real, it is our life being exploited in this film, in a film that you never decided to take part in, where people with smashed heads, and smashed for real, are carried next to you whilst the police refuse to let them through.

Before the police start charging people we try to talk, to make jokes, we smile at each other, “despite everything, I’m happy to be with you all!” To try warming up we improvise a dance class where one of us teaches the others different dance steps. But after a while we just try to keep on smiling, and the more we stay here, the less we are able to talk, we see the screams getting nearer to us, another line of policemen on the opposite side of the square is charging people. We look terrified at a nightmare getting closer. We stay very near to the police line, the one behind us, as to seek protection, and how pathetic to think about us still seeking protection from danger by the police now that I’m writing all this. We beg them to let us out, there are people crying. A policeman tells someone, with a confidential tone of voice, that the place where we are is safe, that we should stay here. After five minutes the same policeman with all the others in his line is charging us. All this seems madness to us, we don’t understand, also because they look like human beings, despite the way they are dressed and the weapons they carry, and you want to see them as human beings, because you are frightened, upset. And they also talk like human beings, and their tone of voice changes, from confidential, to reassuring, to authoritative. It’s only after leaving this nightmare that we understand that they were not human beings there, they were just acting as human beings, they were just part of a spectacular machine of violence. I heard accounts of ’68 when students used to discuss with the lined up police, and it happened that some policemen started trembling because of those discussions. Now it is the police who look for discussions, but these are not really discussions, because the policemen are trained to say what they say, and to even think what they think, they are just a sort of shell that still appears human, but is prevented for thinking and feeling autonomously. Pedagogy of the Metropolitan Police: the idea of the total control of a working body, trained to act convincingly, and looking for this theatrical exchange. Apotheosis of a hideous

spectacle, where the police become something like the nation's top company of virtuosos (luckily for now there are no international tours planned, citizens have to travel abroad to appreciate the different performances).

The policemen are paid to act in that way, and trained to act and speak and think in that way, and there are so many of them, and they are so well trained, and so much money goes into paying for all of this, and after today this money will be even more, more money for this training and less money for education, for this other very different "training" that develops critical thinking. And the money, of course, is not going to us here, once again it is we who are working for free, as unprofessional actors this time, this is free and enforced labour, we are forced to act in a TV drama where our life is put in danger for real, in a sort of huge horrifying snuff movie, that will be used by its brilliant producers to convince the TV news watchers and everybody else that stronger measures have to be taken against this uncontrollable terrorism that the students and the youth are able to provoke. Thanks to this kind of production more and more people will accept for this country, and not only this one, a further descent into this sort of spectacular fascist regime, which is shutting down and destroying the places where people are taught how to use their brain (how to use our body to think).

>>>We need crack this control over the media<<< >>>We need to contrast this monopoly of violence<<< >>>We need to re-appropriate what has been taken away from us (commoning)<<<

A girl with a megaphone screams asking the students of Manchester University to gather, a bus is waiting for them, the students are allowed to leave if they show their ID card. A guy is distributing tickets for the bus and he puts a couple in my hands, I ask for more, my friends stretch their hands towards him. It is when the Manchester students, and us with them, prepare to leave that the police charge all of us. We cannot believe it, this is what we are still able to say to each other: "I don't believe this", this is not possible, it doesn't make sense, not here, not in this country. There are all sorts of people amongst us, there are some smartly dressed girls, young people, old people, there is a guy who stares the policemen, face to face, for hours, immobile. There are also some of my students that have never been to a demonstration before. I try to smile at them, as if everything would be fine, but after a point all I can do is to pretend to be

annoyed, and I shake my head as if to say, “This is all so silly”. But this is not really what I think and feel, and I don’t even know what I feel anymore.

We run away from our spot, from the police charging us. Now we are on the other side of the square, squeezed, we don’t feel the cold anymore, our bodies are pressed together. The police starts releasing people one by one. It is around 8.30pm I think. Every time we hear a window crashing we all tremble, we, this crowd of people the end of which we cannot see. Now I start worrying about what can happen when we leave the crowd. We know that it is our right not to say our name. Someone suggests to cover our faces when going out. I am about to leave, the guy before me has a scarf covering his mouth, the policeman shouts at him, the boy takes immediately the scarf away from his face, but another policeman takes him away. I show the content of my bag to a policeman and I leave. I pass beside two more policemen with a camera but they don’t take any pictures of me. Two of my friends come after me. But we are the last to leave the crowd. The line is closed again. I’m outside now but I still can’t believe what is going on. The three of us hug each other looking at the crowd behind the line, at the row of horses in front of us. One of my student phones me, she is crying: “Please, do something, help me, talk with a policeman, I cannot stay here any longer, please...” I don’t know what to say, I mumble something to her, and then I ask a policeman where will they let people out, even though I know it doesn’t make any sense to ask it. Westminster, he says. A policeman shouts with a megaphone: “You are free now, just go to Westminster bridge and leave the square.” By now people know that this is just another lie. The police charge the crowd. We decide to leave. Our friends and everybody else will be pushed onto Westminster Bridge and detained there for another couple of hours. I don’t know much of what happened there. I know that people were left to wet themselves. I heard that more violence was perpetrated by the police. They had dogs on the bridge. I called my friends after they were released, but they were not really able to talk. “Great, you are finally free!”, I say. “No, it’s not great... it’s not great... it’s not great...” is the reply. The same night my friend writes an email saying “I’m not sure I could ever endure something like that again – which is what they intended”. The day after she sends us another email: “The numbness is wearing off now. From now on I will join every single demonstration.”

Since I left Parliament square I have been about to cry many times. I haven’t done this yet. A friend told me “you must have been really scared”. But I was not scared, it was

something else, something that I could not really describe. And this is the question I ask myself since that evening: how to channel all of this into something else, into something different from a feeling of hatred? How to turn this violence into another kind of violence, how to use it as a force that is neither physical nor psychological, as is the one used by the police? How to have this something that brings tears to my eyes do something else, how to make it proliferate it all around, instead of having to vomit it out in the form of a “human” violence like the one inflicted on us?

And possibly, how to practice something like a militant education, an education that is moved by the same intensity of something like a militancy? Because precisely this was at stake that day, and now as well. Pedagogy was the issue, education and its collapse, and what can emerge from this.

The same night I tell to my Colombian and Serbian friends what happened in that square, and they understand everything immediately, right from the start of my account. I spent most of my life in a country that has not been ruled under what is properly called a dictatorship for more than half a century. I know that Europe’s so called democratic countries, like the one where I was born, have organized in a recent “democratic” past some nightmares which were worse than the one I experienced (Genova 2001). I realize that unless you don’t experience something like this it’s difficult to have a sense of what it is. You read this in the newspapers, you watch a documentary, you read it online, but you cannot really get what it is, it’s becoming part of your body. Now I think I have a sense of this, and it is as if I share something else with friends coming from countries like Colombia and Serbia, who have experienced what is called dictatorship.

From what my friends told me, I know that in Latin America the university has traditionally been one of the few places where people could exercise and develop something like a political thinking. This makes us understand the decision to destroy the few places in Europe where people can learn how to exercise and develop something like a political thinking. I wasn’t able to make sense of the closure of the philosophy department at Middlesex until two days ago: why should the managerial board of a university close a prestigious department that attracts many students and consequently brings high profits? They said it was because of the economic crisis, but this would be an illogical paradox. Now everything becomes clearer. There is an old Italian saying that goes like this: “Al contadin non far sapere quanto e’ buono il formaggio con le

pere”, that is, don’t let the peasant know how good is cheese with pears. This is at the very bottom of what is happening here, at the bottom of the sinking of this country, and not only this one, into a spectacular fascism ruled by national and international elites and corporations. This is what the saying tells: “Erase all the possibilities for people to think and experience what they have not experienced, what appears as impossible, like having pleasure in eating something salty together with something sweet for an Italian person in a time where there was no TV instructing us how to eat and cook. Erase for the people the possibility to think and experience something different from what is offered or imposed on them. Erase the conditions for something possible to take place.”

But there is another version of the same saying, it is less known perhaps, but it has been sometimes used nonetheless. It goes like this: “Al padron non far sapere quanto e’ buono il formaggio con le pere.” Don’t let the master know how good is cheese with pears. It is here, through this doubling of the old saying, through the doubling of this manufactured collapse, that we can create, keep creating, the conditions for something possibile to take place.

APPENDIX 14: **Beauty, anger, joy (al padron non far sapere)**

London, 10th of November 2010, we go to the demonstration against the cuts. The government is going to drastically cut the funding of education, Goldsmiths’ public funding will be cut entirely, and the fees could be raised to 9000 pounds a year. But this is not just a demonstration “against”, it is also a celebration of something, even if of what it is not entirely clear: finally coming together, waking up again, having found each other. People dance, sing, smile, the most fantastic banners and slogans are waving, the sun is shining, there are beautiful colours everywhere, some friends of ours are carrying a huge carrot made of paper-pulp, the carrot that has been promised to us donkeys, placed in front of our eyes to make us run and look straight. “Here is your carrot, take it back, we don’t want it anymore!”

It is the articulation of protest and celebration, the pushing together of opposed feelings of anger and joy, that makes not only this demo but also the many collective initiatives that are proliferating in London, and all around the country, something that I have never seen before.

There are students giving lectures in banks and supermarkets, brief talks before the police arrive. These 5 minute lectures are many things at the same time: engaging in a conversation with people shopping at Tesco, exposing yourself, being seen by thousands of people in youtube, shining with beauty, putting yourself at risk, having fun together, laughing, and protesting as a way of disrupting a social mechanism.

There are students occupying libraries, and instead of locking themselves inside the building they keep it open night and day, everyone can go in, at the entrance there is a big sign saying “this library is now open 24 hours”. This is an opening up more than an occupation, it is a use of the building as a *public* place: people talk, discuss, make love (the management condemned especially the use of condoms inside the library), sleep, clean up, eat, decorate walls. The students make the library run when the staff are unable to come to work: the library is *also* open as usual, students who are not “occupying” can use the library, they can take books out, other students issue the books, students talk to each other, whilst some members of staff join the occupation. The teachers are invited to give lectures in the library, ordinary lectures as well, so that university lectures become public and free. The students know that to have the library open means to allow in policemen in plain clothes, but this is part of an openness that might operate transversally. And all this is ultimately a huge experiment, people experimenting new ways of being together, different ways of living, talking, getting passionate, using a building, organising together, without cutting themselves off from the rest of the world, using the library as a place for encounters.

No matter what will happen, this will not be destroyed, it is shaping our bodies, it will be with us as a bodily memory always capable of resurfacing. A Greek friend of mine tells me about her mother: when she was young, in the ‘60s and ‘70s, she took part in the uprisings in Greece, and then, as an adult, she lived her life as a middle class wife, raising her children, working in an office, cooking and cleaning the house. Now, after a few decades, in the last few years, when students started to protest in the streets, something came back to her, something that was already there, through her body, she somehow knew it, she could sense it: she goes down to the street and joins the students. Something gets unlocked, a burst of heat, her shoes set on fire.

There is something that gets through my body with this acceleration, in bits and pieces, from different sides: it cannot be either or, it cannot be either anger or joy, either protest or celebration, either active criticism or life experiment. It cannot be testing forms of life as an independent experiment, as something separated from the crap all around us, from a cancerous machinery that invades our bodies (we cannot protect ourselves by reducing this rickety gang to an enclosed group). It cannot be an eradication of the crap from our bodies, a purification of my individual body, a narcissistic taking care of my little garden as a way of complying with my personal role (“take good care of yourself and the world will be a better place...”). It cannot be a “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s”, in the sense of conducting a parallel, discreet, invisible double life, trying to change something whilst hiding underneath my apparent or partial integration into a system organised by someone else (“if you are a slave stay a slave and be free in front of God, be free according to a different logic – according to a separation between micro and macropolitics”).

The *protest* now is something else or something more than a “demonstration”: it is the sabotage of a machinery (throwing your high-heel shoes into the gears of a globally extended machine), and it is also the *celebration* of something, of getting together in a way that we haven’t done before, overflowing with something, so that it’s not really us, it’s not really me, as I’m supposed to be, as a PhD student, as a teacher, as someone who has to carefully maintain his self with itself, in order to function efficiently and protect himself from others.

Protest and celebration, all this is also celebration of beauty, the beauty of these bodies together, from a Topshop beauty to its doubling, not against it, but departing from it. Not against but ahead of fashion, further away and dissipating itself, a doubling of flimsiness, from spectacular images to a light storm of uneven intensities, a moving together in slightly different and unpredictable ways, dancing to *I Feel Good* as young bodies.

And as *young* bodies in the sense of bodies that tremble, in the passage between childhood and adulthood, in the stage when a body becomes monstrous, both vulnerable and dangerous, contagious, secreting previously unseen fluids, no one really understands what is going on, you don’t know the future forms of your body, of your life, and to some extent you don’t care to know.

We learned how to look smart, how to look beautiful, how to look young, we learned how to act light-heartedly, and how to feel so light, so superficial, so empty, so depthless, to the extent of having the impression of being able to fly... And now we are ready to fly, but for real, and this time we are going to fly together, like a swarm, around the streets of London, wearing wigs and cha cha heels, shining with beauty, brandishing the leg of a mannequin as a weapon. Now we are going to be beautiful for real, this is a collective, diversifying, material beauty: the days of top models are over, the “Next Top Models” we all are, are now going to use pavements and streets as catwalks, whilst Angelea takes back her dreams and smashes windows with them, waddling as she learned so well. The news is that she is not alone anymore, sleeping in a bus station, it’s not her career anymore, she is not forced to compete with anyone, and this has truly become her life, our life.

Now we are going to be stupid for real, that is, we are going to generate stupefaction, we are becoming stupid in such a way that you won’t understand anymore, you won’t know how to deal with this overwhelming stupidity, because we are also thinking at the same time, thinking through our bodies, through our skin, its folds, its holes. Whilst you are simply dull, a dull machinery that cannot do anything without our bodies.

You act as if nothing can touch you now, and you wanted this for us as well: indifference, as the result of a segregation of individuals, pursuing private wellbeing, developing careers, taking care of our personal feelings, each of us against the other in a non-relation of competition. A connection with others is allowed only *at work*, in the form of productive friendships, exclusive complicities, hierarchical agreements, and only with “others” who are, or have to become, pretty much the same. A relation with others is not only allowed but also required inside the *company*, this company-as-my-family that tends to coincide with my life, where I am instructed how to relate with my colleagues, where I am supposed to socialize and make friends and contribute to create a “healthy” working environment, and I am helped, and encouraged to do that, so that “life in common” is here put at work as fuel for productivity. A connection with others-as-the-same is also allowed in your leisure time, which is supposed to take the form of *entertainment*, as a mode of remaining where you already are, a spinning around yourself.

But now for the first time I see what the “others” do and I think: that’s fantastic! And this goes beyond a critical opinion, there is something that hits my belly. A *divertissement*, as a practice of diverting, of going together somewhere else, becoming something else, replaces entertainment as a mode of retaining and detaining ourselves. It is not just the students: professors as well suddenly talk a different language, so different from the hyper-intellectual one (spinning around itself) that we are used to hearing. There is something else at stake now, they seem to sometimes forget the need to present their “distinguished” (separated) academic persona in “public”.

You tried to repress our ability to affect and be affected, you tried to exploit it, to manage it for the sake of a hyper-productivity. But you are miserably failing. Because now we don’t have so much to lose anymore, you start replacing carrots with police batons, you are not producing attractive images of a future anymore. All that is left to us is a shiny emptiness, and we are learning to use it as a weapon, and we are going to teach this to everybody, we’ll learn it together: how to turn high heels against you – you made us buy them, you taught us how to wear them, and now we are going to use them as weapons against you. We’ll make your empire collapse, bit by bit, fighting carrots and batons with shimmering wigs and high heels: improper weapons against which yours will be useless.

Even in the kettle of the 9th of December, despite the horror organised by the police, there were moments of shining beauty and concrete glamour, people elegantly climbing fences and walls at a fantastic speed, an inch away from the line of the policemen, from their stiffed bodies erased by protective armours, bodies trained to obey and waiting to receive their next order. From the “beauty” of the media representing a staged nightmare to induce a feeling of fear, to a *beauty* of unmanageable gestures.

You talk about “big society”, suddenly you want us to get together, to help each other, to organise our own free universities, our own community centres, our own social assistance. Because it’s austerity time (for us of course, not for you) there is no more public money for all this: money is private now (that is, yours). With this “big society” you are trying to appropriate the tools that people have constructed to organize themselves, you ask everybody to use them but in a certain way, as valuable and positive tools, as tools that would serve the health of capital (your health). And of course you don’t talk here about yourself, it is as if you were just another victim of this

sad “misfortune” called crisis, as if your machinery of deprivation should be our destiny. “Solidarity! Fraternity! Mutual help! The society of the deprived (that is, society as a whole, according to your plans) gets together to survive!” How romantic.

But we don’t care about surviving, we want to shine. You can put austerity up your ass, we’ll keep taking pleasure from each other, practising a different eroticism, a collective one, where collectivity does not coincide with a society. We are going to build another solidarity, not a “positive” or “useful” one, but one based on beauty, anger, joy. We are going to create a different fraternity, an incestuous and obscene one, as a series of conjunctions amongst people entirely different from each other. We are going to take care of each other not as a way of protecting ourselves from “misfortunes” presented as if they were fallen from the sky, but through attaining pleasure from being together and acting together, from looking gorgeous whilst taking back the pavements, the streets, re-appropriating spaces and everything else that has been taken away from us. Until there is nothing left of you, nothing left of you vs. us, and we’ll become “us”, not as a unity but as a diversifying beauty.

I have never used a “you and us” before: at Goldsmiths I have learned to detect and undo oppositions instead of reinforce them. I would have never used this “you and us” before this winter and what is happening now. Now we should get back to something like a you and us, actually we are already forced to by you, by your politics of opposition and separation (the kettle is precisely a device to stage and create this opposition and separation). But we go back to a different you and us, in a different form, reclaiming it as non-oppositional. Not the old antagonism of “us against them”, as enemies in an arena, not in the sense of two factions confronting each other. We are reclaiming a “militancy” that will acquire ever new shapes, and as such it is not (only) based on serious commitment and rational strategies. But it is still a militancy. It is still protest what students are doing today, it is protest *again*, in new forms, protest as a post-spectacular celebration, as a joyous violence that differs from the miserable violence of the state.

These “us” and “you” are not constituted around an identity, their identity is unstable, it continues to constitute itself differently every time we say and think this “we” that we have the potential to be. This “you” is here primarily written as the machinery (capitalism), and also as the individuals (these compositions of different elements that

are perceived as individuals) that work to make it function and take advantage of it at the expense of others.

But, it could be said, these individuals are not only fraudulent managers and corrupt politicians, it is also all of us, since we are all part of the capitalist machinery... If “there is no outside” of capitalism, if we are all involved in its machinery, if this is what we have learned in the last few decades, our involvement should get contaminated with something that spoils it: something should spoil what gets “normalized” according to a cheerful neoliberal thinking.

What was written some decades ago by post-structuralist thinkers had *also*, back then, the effect and purpose of hindering something. We need to use those texts in such a way that a further hindrance can be produced again and today. At Goldsmiths I have learned that we cannot go far by means of opposition, and that politics can be done by experimenting with new forms of life. And now I am learning that we cannot go far just by “thinking positive”, without, not only analysing our living conditions (and this gets too often reduced to the safe task of the academic researcher), but also sabotaging the machinery that regulates their functioning. So let’s think and act more than “positive”, much more positive than neoliberalist smiley faces pretend to do. Let’s think and act so positive that, it’s difficult to tell whether *inadvertently* or not, we end up spoiling the appropriate smiles reproduced by the media.

It is you and us, but we know there are not only people in the world, there are not only people plus a machinery people inhabit, there are many other things which are not necessarily visible, which are not easy to perceive, and which pass across both people and machineries, shaping each in turn. You and us, it is not a fixed opposition, and to some extent it is also a strategic way of channelling forces, a staging of them. It is you staging the opposition, the police against the protesters, along a line of confinement. But we don’t want to follow this oppositional staging you create, we don’t want to fall into your trick of separating us from you, of making us believe that you are Power, you have the macropolitical power, and we are excluded from it.

Crisis Centre

What follows is our contribution to the dance, in the form of some uncertain steps that would not have been initiated otherwise, without this 9th of November and everything that goes with it. Manuel and I are at the demo with our bags, we are flying the same day to Berlin, to a symposium organized by students of the Freie Universitaet. There are other people coming from London, and somehow we manage to bring to Berlin some bits of what is happening in the UK. For this symposium we – Manuel, myself, and a few others from Goldsmiths – have prepared some proposals for activities. The aim of the symposium is to experiment “new formats for academia”, but instead of coming up with something from scratch in Berlin, we developed some ideas for activities using our PhD research, trying to transpose theory into practice.

Here are the proposals: to bring together a Maoist questionnaire on “crisis” and a mapping exercise resulting in a “Crisis Centre” (from Badiou and Deleuze); to have a schizoanalytic session (from Deleuze and Guattari); to have an “Ignorant Forest” workshop where we exchange our PhD topics and “teach” a topic to the student who is researching it (from Ranciere / Jacotot); to have a “Critical Fanatical” reading of a text, where someone reads a text important to her, and the others intervene in the performance, playing with the fanatical body and at the same time responding to the text (from Boal and Virno). Together with these proposals, we bring our collection of wigs with us: one thing is clear from the beginning, the wigs are going to play a crucial role in all this.

The first day of the symposium we set up the Crisis Centre. We use the questionnaire to pose the question of “crisis”: our personal crisis, our crisis as PhD students... Someone derogatively defined this activity as “kitchen psychology”. We like this definition, it’s not really psychology, but it is definitely “kitchen”, not so much because of the wigs we are wearing, but because this way of starting something from our everyday experience, from our anxieties and desires, in order to create connections amongst them, amongst us, and formulate a collective analysis of the crisis: this is something that comes from “the personal is political” of the ‘60s, from the feminist experience of coming out from the kitchen and getting together.

After conversing we decide to open the Crisis Centre to the “customers”, to turn it into a drop-in centre, offering “consultancy” to other students. Our tools are the wigs, the badges we wear indicating our roles (“Crisis Unpaid Intern / crisps and sandwiches provided”, “Crisis Chief Executive Maternity Cover”, “Crisis Health and Safety Part-Time Advisor”...), the Maoist questionnaire, the discussion we just had, and the excitement generated through it. Wigs and badges prove to be powerful tools, they help us move away from ourselves as PhD students, from ourselves as ourselves. We work in small groups or in one to one sessions. All this seems rather silly, we planned this stupidity from the beginning, and we are having fun, we become able to speak, to listen, to discuss together, to take decisions together, and we support each other, caring for each other. We are acting as specialists, but most of us are precarious, interns, a collectively self-employed personnel with patched-up trousers (but beautiful hairstyles). There is so much we are capable of, and this surprises us, it is overwhelming. All these books we have been reading for years in the library and in our rooms, all this writing we have done in front of our laptops, together with all the different jobs we have been taking to survive until now, there is so much we can do with all this, with this “intellect”, with these skills, if we find a way of unlock them, share them, away from a career, pretending that this is yet another job but it’s not, it’s a sort of game we are playing with each other.

After this first day Stefanie talks with some fellow students and together they decide to ask the head of the department to change the structure of the “colloquium”, a hierarchically set up presentation / exam that takes place at the Freie Universitaet, where students have to defend themselves from the professors’ interrogations, whilst little space is given to the contribution of other PhD students.

The second day we decide to have a schizoanalytic workshop as a continuation of the Crisis Centre. But there is no schizoanalyst amongst us. I try to explain to the others how a schizo workshop could be conducted, I talk about desire in Deleuze and Guattari. I’m nervous, I feel I’m talking for too long, the others stare at me blankly, now I’m stuttering, we look at each other perplexed, we all think “this is not going to work”. «When Deleuze and Guattari talk about desire they don’t mean something else, they mean desire. But they think desire in a different way. It is not the case that desire is necessarily “good”, and its restriction, its blockage, a negative. Desire is also what capitalism incites and produces. We can take the banal example of seeing a skirt in a

shop window and coming to “desire” this commodity. Deleuze and Guattari say: if we see this desire differently, not as a segment going from a subject to an object, but as something more complex and wider, we might be able to transform the desire itself. Desire is a process, it is on the move. I desire the skirt, but there is much more than myself and a skirt at stake: the skirt relates to a series of situations in which I could wear it, be beautiful, meet people, and this series could extend to cover a myriad of things that are not necessarily present within consciousness. The point would not be to make desire conscious, but to sense it as something other than a static relation between myself and an object, or another subject, or an aspiration. No doubt capitalism incites desires, it is at all times concerned with a production of desire. But capitalism is interested only in those aspects of desire that produce profit. “Unlocking blockages” is to sense and construct desires differently, away from capitalism and its axioms. If I perceive desire in a different way, as a complexity that can carry (myself) further away, the skirt might become just an (optional) element in a machine that functions anyway and could function otherwise. And something like a catastrophic desire might be unleashed, catastrophic for capitalism in the first place.»

We decide to start and make our way through a protracted, tempestuous conversation; the symposium ends, the others are drinking beer around us but we just carry on and on with this schizoanalytic session. Since there is no one who can facilitate the session we do so collectively: each of us tells the others about personal blockages and desires relating to ourselves as PhD students. Everyone else re-reads these blockages and desires, shifting the personal towards the collective, producing a proliferation of connections across different desires and blockages. “I thought I was the only one thinking this!” “Yes, same for me...” “It seems as if we have been kept in isolation until now, and now we are finally talking to each other!” “I always thought it was my fault, I thought I was stupid, not good enough for a PhD, and I felt guilty because of that, but now I understand that it’s not like that, it’s not all about myself!” At the end of the day we declare the Crisis Centre officially founded. We plan to continue the activities in the near future.

A month later the Goldsmiths Anthropology department organizes a teach-in entitled *Unkettling Education*. We decide to take part in it as the Crisis Centre, and a couple of people join us from Berlin. The teach-in is a series of talks on different activities and topics related to the cuts. By looking at the names of the speakers I thought that us, with our wigs, would not easily fit into such a framework of serious activism. We don’t even

appear on the program. We follow the opening session where a guy tries to “activate” the audience, “provoking” the students, asking loudly “So, what are you doing here? Can you answer this question, please? Come on, you should know why you are here, so tell me, give me an answer!” I guess this is some sort of consciousness awakening technique. We move somewhere else in the building with our collection of wigs and we start talking about the teach-in and about the “crisis”. This time we focus more on what is going on in London, and we put together a new questionnaire. We are aware that the setting here is different from Berlin and we discuss this as well. At some point we put our wigs on and declare the Crisis Centre open in front of the group of students attending the teach-in. I’m a bit nervous, we all are. Some students giggle, some of them smile, I don’t have the strength to really look at them. “This is crazy”, I think, I hate to stand in front of people looking at me, with or without a wig on my head. After our 60 seconds presentation we sit down, waiting for people to come and talk to us. No one comes. Opposite to us the University for Strategic Optimism is doing better: they have a booth where people can make a statement that gets filmed and later put on youtube – they manage to attract a few people. Some of us make use of the booth, reading parts of a Crisis Centre text Manuel has written using the material gathered in Berlin. But no one comes to us, the Crisis Centre is itself in crisis...

If no one comes to us, we’ll go to them. Stefanie, Tijana and I decide to go around the cafeteria, and sit at people’s tables, talking with them about the crisis and the cuts and everything else. We take the wigs off. We hesitate a bit, standing between tables. There is a student by himself, we sit down and by doing so we find out that it is possible to do this: to ask someone you don’t know “can I sit here and talk to you?” And you sit down and talk.

And now, after talking with a few people in the cafeteria, we ask ourselves: what are we doing with this Crisis Centre, why are we doing this, where does this go? Are we going to go around the city making people talk and think, and talking and thinking together with them? Where is the sabotage here, where is the protest, and where is the experimentation with new forms of collective life? Could we become nomads as Robert Walser was, wandering around and “falling in love” with people, trees, buildings, a dog, a sunset, a blow of wind, to such an extent that institutions (The Institute) collapse, the structure of a sociability as we know it crumbles, and different ways of living together emerge?

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