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The Biopolitical Quest for Individuality as a Reactionary Device

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Abstract

With the advent of digitization and the affirmation of a symbolic value on social exchange within capital, public demonstrations of discontent are nowadays being performed along an *aesthetic canon*, thus losing their possible revolutionary potential. Once we internalized that it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, our struggles become individually symbolic and turn to aestheticism. Rather than stopping discontent, the power chooses to allow it because its performative content has already been neutralized. These demonstrations happen within a democratic culture – they play within the *rules of the game*. This is the imperial domination: to guarantee a resemblance of global peace for capital to develop, at the price of local omni-crisis. If Empire is born and shows itself as crisis, this crisis is felt at every peripheral point of the Empire. Solutions of governmentality have worked until now, but at a cost: even though there still are cathartic events, they don't manage to release social tension completely – they always leave a mimetic residual. It's on those physical and psychological spaces of individual recognition that the Empire exercises its domination. And it's there that forms of resistance can be tested.

Keywords: Governmentality, Psychopolitics, Symbolic exchange.

Disclaimer

A first draft of this article was written before the COVID-19 global outbreak. As the governmental response to the virus partly confirmed the biopolitical dynamics explained in the article, the author added updated content to exemplify what was previously theorized.

1. A necessary introduction: virtual spaces and the space for the political

Among the academic circle, one of the least considered and underestimated aspects of the rise and affirmation of ICTs is their total reconfiguration of our notion of space. When speaking of virtuality, critics and media scholars usually refer to a shift within the psychological or emotional sphere. Very rarely we hear of a reflection purely in spatial terms: namely, the generation of a new dimension where human life can be experienced. A good exception is represented by Luciano Floridi's work. His main relevant contribution is a definition of *infosphere*: a new habitat where «an increasing number of agents (not only people [...]) operate and spend more and more time» (Floridi, 2015, p. 56). This is in fact the only possible background from which we can speak of an information revolution. If digital platforms thrive on data (I'll focus on that later) it is because we no longer live in a biosphere. Thus, the key idea behind the concept of infosphere: once we start living our lives in two dimensions at once (the so-called *real* and the so-called *virtual*) we realize

we share our environment with non-human agents¹. If we want to make sense of our contemporary experience of the whole realm of daily events, we need to update our ontological foundation of the world. A new common atomic substrate must be thought of, and that's information. Information is what supersedes the bios. Information is what associates every inhabitant of the infosphere, and we have to start from information if we want to get an ecologic approach of our everyday existence. Of course this transformation (which Floridi welcomes as the advent of *hiperhistory*²) carries changes in many different aspects of life. We will focus on the political ones here. Before digitization we could conceive the state as «a legally defined term which refers, at the level of substance, to a state power that possesses both internal and external sovereignty, at the spatial level over a clearly delimited terrain (the state territory) and at the social level over the totality of members (the body of citizens or the people)» (Habermas, Cronin, & De Greiff, 2005, p. 107). On such an account, the Sovereign State is the only monopolist of both power and force. That is to say, it is the organism who controls all citizens' data and it's the only legitimate Institution allowed to make use of brute force. But as we reach the hyperhistorical frame, a plurality of informational agents enters the scene. The State no longer is the main informational agent (although maintaining the monopoly of force). Data is thus de-centered, now also owned and managed by private agents³.

But if we go back to our basic definition of State, we can also understand how another crucial prerogative of sovereignty is a spatial coherence and unity. What's of the geographical identity of a State, when its citizen also experience life in a de-territorializing, borderless, simultaneously global space? Very simply, cohesion starts melting⁴. «At the level of the nation-state, agency has been brought perilously close to impotence, and that is because power, once locked in a tight embrace with state politics, is now evaporating into the global, extraterritorial 'space of flows', far beyond the reach of the persistently territorial politics of the state» (Bauman & Lyon, 2016, p. 96). The distinction between local and global loses any pristine meaning. Marshall McLuhan once said that, in the electronic age, «culture becomes organized like an electric circuit: each point in the net is as central as the next. «A second problem, that of cohesion, for it answered not just the question of who or what the State is, but also the question of who or what belongs to the State and hence may be subject to its norms and actions» (Floridi, 2015, p. 58). Electric man loses touch with the concept of a ruling center as well as the restraints of social rules based on interconnection. Hierarchies constantly dissolve and reform» (McLuhan & Powers, 1989, p. 92). Citizens are at the meeting point between the *centrifugal push* of the digital and the *centripetal pull* of the real. The outcome is the fostering of some sort of «“third spaces,” i.e., ones shaped by a sense of group sharing and intimacy that is neither individually private in a strong

¹ And a third kind of entity which can be conceived as a hybridization between human and non-human.

² «In prehistory, there are no ICTs; in history, there are ICTs, they record and transmit data, but human societies depend mainly on other kinds of technologies concerning primary resources and energy; in hyperhistory, there are ICTs, they record, transmit and, above all, process data, increasingly autonomously, and human societies become vitally dependent on them and on information as a fundamental resource. Added-value moves from being ICT-related to being ICT-dependent» (Floridi, 2015, p. 52)

³ Which, contrarily to the state institutions, have no accountability whatsoever towards people's welfare.

⁴ «a second problem, that of cohesion, for it answered not just the question of who or what the State is, but also the question of who or what belongs to the State and hence may be subject to its norms and actions» (Floridi, 2015, p. 58).

sense nor public in some wholesale sense» (Floridi, 2015, p. 100). To live hyper-historically is to witness the enhancement of (*perceived*, at least) direct social responsibility. This totally changes our attitude towards political participation. If the previous settlement was that of an *opt-out* from a default situation in which we were automatically sorted out as a specific part of society (workers, middle class, students, and so on), in hyperhistory we *opt-in*. The hyperhistorical individual is a *task-oriented* citizen. To quote Floridi again:

ICTs fluidify the topology of politics. ICTs do not merely enable but actually promote the agile, temporary and timely aggregation, disaggregation and re-aggregation of distributed groups around shared interests across old, rigid boundaries, represented by social classes, political parties, ethnicity, language barriers, and so forth [...] democracy has become a media led democracy, in which multiagent systems (understood as distributed groups temporary and timely aggregated around shared interests) have multiplied and become sources of influence external to the Nation State (Floridi, 2015, p. 56)

Dis-intermediation is a false myth, a rhetorical Trojan horse to hide the actual re-mediation of politics. Obviously, it is a simple truth that parties are disappearing (in the advanced west) and we can't speak of civil society in class terms anymore. Local power is re-dimensioned. «The ideal of local government can be interpreted as an ideal inspired by the principle that the closer power is physically, the more visible it is» (Bobbio, 1987, p. 82). With hyperhistory we say farewell to the disciplinarian form of government over bodies. But the great feature of the panoptic structure is to be in full strength exactly when it's not perceived.

2. The Digital Panopticon

We could sum up this coming paragraph as follows: a contemporary Foucauldian reading makes it pretty clear – and, to some extent, confirms – that the panopticon doesn't transpire as a *technical possibility* as much as a form of life which has been interiorized. At the present time, this has been achieved for the (not-so-accidental) convergence of two elements: the application of behavioral studies over entire populations and the rise of the virtual space (or, *spaces*). To put it clearly: the application of behavioral studies *in* the virtual space. A psychopolitical use of such techniques of control turns the *negativity* of discipline into the *positivity* of freedom (Byung-Chul Han's can). Exactly because of these pre-conditions, the recognition of a surveillance state is perceived by the individual as a tool for self-expression. What this subject fails to grasp is that his self-expression is actually just of a conditioned kind – eventually resulting in self-exploitation. On a psychopolitical dimension, to express oneself is to conform to a *social production of psychic (non-pecuniary) debt*.

I will explore these elements now.

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. By this very fact, the external power may throw off its physical weight; it tends to the non-corporal; and, the more it approaches this limit, the more constant, profound and permanent are its effects: it is a perpetual victory that avoids any physical confrontation and which is always decided in advance (Foucault, 2020, Discipline, par. 3)

It's easy to mark Foucault's 1975's book *Discipline and punish* as a landmark for the literature on the panoptical structure. His main take: disciplinarian societies are modelled along the same principles on which the prison system is based. Quoting Han (actualizing Foucault's work on neoliberalism), we shift to psychopolitics when the «negativity of training and drills (*Abrichtung*) [...] constitutive of disciplinary power» (Han, 2017, Chapter 4) yields to

the principle of positivity. Needs are not repressed but stimulated. Confession obtained by force has been replaced by voluntary disclosure. Smartphones have been substituted for torture chambers. Big Brother now wears a friendly face. His friendliness is what makes surveillance so efficient (Han, 2017, Chapter 8)

Power got (apparently) invisible to turn subjects⁵ into (self-) capitalists. One can only exploit freedom when it's publicly perceived as such: «the “more soft and subtle” the panoptic surveillance the more it produces the normalization of behavior» (Marder, Joinson, Shankar, & Houghton, 2016, p. 589). We are all part of a long-term behavioral experiment. It comes as no surprise that what's probably the most silent and yet most implicitly celebrated work comes from the same era in which *Discipline and punish* was written.

The problem is to induce people not to be good but to behave well. The issue is again the visibility of control. As environmental contingencies become harder to see, the goodness of autonomous man becomes more apparent, and there are several reasons why punitive control becomes inconspicuous (Skinner, 1972, p. 70)

In 1971, *Beyond freedom and dignity* was published. Although a definitely controversial publication, his main thesis still resonates today: to speak of an autonomous man is to forget about his *ecosystemic* existence. Free choice is only an arbitrary metaphysical definition applied when one can't discern the dynamics of environmental control. If we want to make sense of human capital, we have got to start from this psychological undergrowth.

The fundamental mistake made by all those who choose weak methods of control is to assume that the balance of control is left to the individual, when in fact it is left to other conditions. The other conditions are often hard to see, but to continue to neglect them and to attribute their effects to autonomous man is to court disaster (Skinner, 1972, p. 99)

On a biopolitical account, autonomous man is a fiction. Not in psychological and metaphysical terms – as intended by Skinner – but in social terms. The emphasis is not on free will as much as on the perception of freedom. The psychopolitical regime appears as the least authoritarian exactly because it *disseminates* control all over the environment. «As environmental contingencies become harder to see, the goodness of autonomous man becomes more apparent» (Skinner, 1972, p. 70). Control is exercised both conspicuously and subtly. It is not just in the CCTV systems.

We find ourselves in a short circuit. Citizens know they're constantly being watched and yet they «never really feel that they are being watched or threatened» (Han, 2017, Chapter 8). But this is no catch 22: we know we're observed but we

⁵ From the Latin *subiectus*: he who is subdued.

don't perceive it as a treat due to its friendly face. CCTV is no scarier than our smartphones' camera. Everything is a medium for self-expression. On such a panoptic structure there's no need for a surveillant anymore. Its transparent architecture establish the possibility of a total reciprocal surveillance. A surveillance which is perceived as an opportunity to express oneself, to expand and show one's own human capital. Big Brother is nowadays just a TV format: the opportunity for everyone to be a star. Orwell's fears collided and melted with Huxley's pleasures. The ultimate goal is to create useful individuals (Ippolita, 2017). *The endless and continuous possibility of being watched is the reassurance that we can always invest in our future.*

But, as control goes widespread in order not to be directly perceived, the power shifts from the crown to the infrastructure⁶. This is no side effect. This is a feature of biopolitics. The urban metropolis is the quintessential milieu of inconspicuous control. It is in the scientifically distanced, single-seat benches of *La Rambla*. It is in the different dislocation of street lighting around urban areas. Beware: this is not just an act of public cleanliness against homelessness and micro-criminality. It is the displacement of preventive, counter-insurrectional measures. It is in fact the surrender to imagining a cultural, humane way out of slumification and touristification. What's defended is the hyperreal city, the postcard city, the commodified space. When the power is in the infrastructure, no institution is accountable anymore:

In the age when power manifested itself through edicts, laws, and regulations, it was vulnerable to critical attack. But there's no criticizing a wall (Comitè Invisible & Hurley, 2015, p. 86).

This is one of the reasons why it seems childish and folkloristic to attack governments or politicians and channel our discontent towards them: «reproaching politicians for "not representing us" only maintains a nostalgia. The politicians are not there for that, they're there to distract us, since power is elsewhere. And this correct intuition is what turns nutty in all the contemporary conspiracisms» (Comitè Invisible & Hurley, 2015, p. 83). When power is infrastructural, it provides the owners of such infrastructures with the means to operate upon a mass of isolated individuals. On a certain sense, authority «is supplanted by technique [...] impersonal systems of discipline and control produce certain knowledge of human behavior independent of consent» (Zuboff, 2015, p. 81). Big Data isn't just a tool for commercial purposes. More than that, it is an ever-updating map of the global subconscious. If nobody *belongs* to the virtual world⁷, everybody *lives* on it. The «absolute fragmentation» of the social is the key to «absolute order» (Comitè Invisible & Hurley, 2017, p. 47). Once again, the prison system resurfaces. Digital profiling is in fact the natural successor of criminal profiling. Individuals are scheduled based on their methods of execution (Ippolita, 2017). Control becomes pre-reflexive. This proved to be true especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. What we observed was a twofold response, depending on the (apparent) display of how policy makers pondered upon the delicate balance between (individual) privacy and (public) safety – a dilemma that, as it presents nowadays, originates from the post-

⁶ «power no longer resides in the institutions [...] power is simply no longer that theatrical reality to which modernity accustomed us [...] power now resides in the infrastructures of the world» (Comitè Invisible & Hurley, 2015, p. 82).

⁷ *Netizen* is a spurious concept.

9/11 measures, at least. That is to say, on one side we have States who opted for a total centralization of information. Although (for the most part) transparent and public, this was a textbook example of criminal profiling translated into non-prison systems. QR codes, IoT, CCTV and smartphones apps were sponsored – and welcomed by the public – as a necessary tool for a faster, less deadly and safer way out of the pandemic. It is worth noticing that among these States we can find advanced democracies with ultra-capitalistic economies (such as South Korea). On the other side of the spectrum we find all those States who decided not to take such a step. The reasons behind such a choice are manifold – that is to say, it was not just about respect for individual privacy. The main one was probably the distance between the governmental bodies and the owners of data: private commercial entities with no legal duties to share their database for cases of *force majeure*. Nevertheless, it is worth noticing that a conspicuous evident violation of individual privacy would be perceived as an intolerable act of tyranny for someone raised on Western values. Nonetheless, it is not the aim of this article to give a moral or cultural judgment. The COVID-19 case was mentioned (aside from its novelty) to reveal how cultural – and economic – standpoints can legitimate and corroborate State policies, even though the biopolitical paradigm is still active in both cases. It is not a matter of governmental means as much as what kinds of publicly discharged policies can a given population accept as *legitimate* (for more on this topic, see (Han, 2020)). All in all – and this the main issue – citizens were asked to choose between a morbid form of captivity and an evident violation of privacy – two intolerable possibilities during times of non-crisis (on this topic, see (Christiano, 2004) and (Lippmann, 1997)). Furthermore, what’s behind the PSA slogans (#iorestoacasa, #yomequedoencasa) is a biopolitical method of *crisis management*: once you hold the individual responsible, you free the state from its accountability on the contagion. The message is simple: if the curve rises, that’s because people didn’t respect the norms of quarantine. This also sparks a psychological war among peers. That’s UGS: User-Generated Surveillance (Bauman & Lyon, 2016). The panopticon⁸ melts with the synopticon⁹(Lyon, 2005)¹⁰.

When interactions are machine-mediated, trust is unnecessary. There's no need for pacts. This is a condition of “contract utopia”: «the aim is to achieve guaranteed social rather than market outcomes using instrumentarian means of behavioral modification» (Zuboff, 2019, Instrumentarian power for a third modernity, para. 4). The infrastructural mode of control thus makes the aesthetic critic to capital (Boltanski, Chiapello, & Elliott, 2018) obsolete and invalid. There's no authenticity anymore, no mass culture to be surreptitiously aligned to. «Conformity now disappears into the mechanical order of things and bodies, not as action but as result, not cause but effect» (Zuboff, 2015, p. 82). Through the means of control empowered by Big Data, capital is taking advantage of the individual existential situation of the human capitalist to build a new type of sociality on its own terms – and the metropolis is its scenery.

There’s a new economy for this new humanity, an economy that doesn’t just want to be a separate sphere of existence but its very fabric, that wants to be the substance of human relationships; a new definition of work, as working on yourself; Capital as human capital; a new idea of production as the production of relational goods, and consumption as the consumption of situations; and above all a

⁸ The *few* watch the *many*.

⁹ The *many* watch the *few*.

¹⁰ The *many* watch the *many*.

new concept of value that embraces all the qualities of human beings (Comitè Invisible, 2007)

3. *The event is dead*

the true face of the end-of-the-world: journalists, waiting, and events that refuse to happen (Comitè Invisible & Hurley, 2015, p. 35)

The bottom line we inherit from the previous paragraphs is clear: biopolitics produces a form of social life on its own basis by means of a spurious conception of freedom.

Subjectivity is a constant social process of generation (Hardt & Negri, 2016, p. 195)

This is applied behaviorism: in order to mold the social, capital got rid of its material status to function as a language. It became environmental to model symbolically the material processes of production. Marx already anticipated it when he said that capital isn't just the mere accumulation of resources and commodities, but rather a mode of production, a code (Berardi, 2001). And this code is precisely a code of virtuality. If we can't talk of a disciplinarian control over bodies is because there is no body over which power can be exercised anymore. To live virtually is exactly this: to be unable to understand our co-existence with the world. It is exactly because we got accustomed to the individual and the environment as two separate entities that we lost sense of both. And when one can't feel his own body, he can't feel the real presence of the other, too. What we've seen, in fact, is that it takes a virus – a purely biological entity – to remind us of our bodies. We are able to grasp a new form of alienation. We treat our body as another source of our human capital. Alienation isn't exerted through the factory anymore. This new alienation is exerted through the fake smiles of the low wage call centers operators. It is exactly when we have to stop – because a global pandemic is outside our windows – that we make experience again of our bodies, something which is undeniably and indissolubly ours. The virus is ruthlessly, implacably real. Through isolation and distancing the panoptical experience was deprived of its invisibility.

This is not the end of the world; it is the end of our *symbiotical relation* to it. «The crisis is not economic, ecological, or political, the crisis is above all that of presence» (Comitè Invisible & Hurley, 2015, p. 31). An evolution of the immunitarian device: it is not just the primitive *cum* which is suppressed. In this new sociality a forged sense of differentiation is the element of unification. The globalization of capital is exactly this: «a regime of the production of identity and difference, or really of homogenization and heterogenization» (Hardt & Negri, 2016, p. 45). Here's why the quote from Tacitus: «ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant». We are all capital, and our individuality is a fictitious device to reproduce it – on its psychic form. This is true production in the biopolitical age: a production of social situations. The new alienation extends commodity fetishism to social relations. That is to say, freedom is now a commodity among others, a fetishized commodity (Chicchi, 2012). The gamification of communication

Is destroying human communication [...] the production of wealth has grown increasingly detached from human labour. Yet at the same time, society has never been so thoroughly committed to work as it is in our post-Fordist age – an epoch that, in ac-

tual fact, is only making labour more and more superfluous [...] The transcendence of Capital stands in the way of life as immanence (Han, 2017, Chapter 10)

The society of the spectacle approaches its completion. When we detach from our own contact with the world, we inhabit – and contribute to furnish – a *hyper-reality*. Every event is ultimately a symbol with no real referent. A series of practices self-referring one to another¹¹, whit no real distinction between the economic, the political and the cultural.

The spectacle is the ruling order's nonstop discourse about itself, its never-ending monologue of self-praise, its self-portrait at the stage of totalitarian domination of all aspects of life (Debord, 2014, par. 24)

Commodities therefore eventually form a global system, a coherent universe of signification. That's why we can't decipher events from a microphysical point of view: needs cannot be interpreted as a mere subject-object relationship, but rather they must be placed within a *coherent symbolical universe* that attributes them a clear meaning. To quote Debord again: «the spectacle is both the meaning and the agenda of our particular socio-economic formation. It is the historical moment in which we are caught» (Debord, 2014, para. 11). As biopolitical individuals, we are consumers of *inauthentic* situations. We never «consume the object in itself (in its use-value) [...] [we] are always manipulating objects (in the broadest sense) as signs which distinguish [us]» (Baudrillard, 2017, p. 61). This is why, at a time in which material production is de-localized and automatized, the only possible form of production is the reproduction of a code¹². It is not paradoxical at all, then, that it took us a quarantine to become aware of the other – exactly when we can no longer experience it daily. The creation of social life on capital's own basis takes then a definitive shape: a sense of collectivity is created as the only possible habitat for spurious differentiation. A setting where a social code can fluctuate.

The truth of consumption is that it is not a function of enjoyment, but a function of production and, hence, like all material production, not an individual function, but an immediately and totally collective one [...] Enjoyment is enjoyment for one's own benefit, but consuming is something one never does alone (this is the illusion of the consumer, meticulously sustained by the whole of the ideological discourse on consumption). One enters, rather, into a generalized system of exchange and production of coded values where, in spite of themselves, all consumers are involved with all others (Baudrillard, 2017, p. 78)

A new form of exploitation that doesn't need to subjugate bodies. It enslaves the psyche through the code of normalization, of homogenization to a common signic cosmos: the law of spectacle. A useful individual therefore perceives social recognition as the goal for a meaningful life. That's why the panoptical gaze isn't scary anymore. «The condition of being watched and seen has thereby been reclassified from a menace into a temptation» (Bauman & Lyon, 2016, p. 26). We slowly reach the core – and the main theme – of this article: at the hyperreal stage of capital (as the society of the spectacle reaches its apex) any

¹¹ «This is, then, no longer a sequence of mere objects, but a chain of signifiers, in so far as all of these signify one another reciprocally as part of a more complex super-object, drawing the consumer into a series of more complex motivations» (Baudrillard, 2017, p. 27).

¹² «'consumption' takes over logically and necessarily from production» (Baudrillard, 2017, p. 75).

revolt against this society from within society itself is just a *different form* of consumption. Nevertheless, it is the *ultimate form* of consumption.

It is *social consumption as fashion*. Ultimately, even every commentary (including this same article), every organized aggregation denouncing capital is nothing but a moment of capital itself.

This world no longer needs explaining, critiquing, denouncing. We live enveloped in a fog of commentaries and commentaries on commentaries, of critiques and critiques of critiques of critiques, of revelations that don't trigger anything, other than revelations about the revelations. And this fog is taking away any purchase we might have on the world (Comitè Invisible & Hurley, 2017, p. 8)

We don't live in a particular set of historical convergences characterized by crisis. We inhabit a *code whose ontology is crisis*. We *are* the crisis.

We're not experiencing a crisis of capitalism but rather the triumph of crisis capitalism [...] The present crisis, permanent and omni lateral, is no longer the classic crisis, the decisive moment. On the contrary, it's an endless end, a lasting apocalypse, an indefinite suspension, an effective postponement of the actual collapse, and for that reason a permanent state of exception. The current crisis no longer promises anything; on the contrary, it tends to free whoever governs from every constraint as to the means deployed (Comitè Invisible & Hurley, 2015, pp. 25–26)

The crisis is a biopolitical device set up to rightfully adopt a series of governmental techniques which would be accepted only under critical situations. It is a tactical move to guarantee a global resemblance of peace¹³ at the cost of a general omni crisis at every peripheral part of the Empire's surface. What faces up every revolt around the world nowadays is a «a global, reticular, counter insurgency machinery» (Comitè Invisible & Hurley, 2015, p. 154). Drawing from Nozick's work, this is the real essence of power, in that it «does not allow anyone else to enforce another system's judgment» (Nozick, 2015, The State of Nature, para. 1). Therefore, when the State power is established as the only possible power, any other form of equally possible legitimate power is a threat to the established order. It is an insurrectional possibility.

Nevertheless, spectacle always wins because he can absorb and incorporate every negative stage within its own dialectic. Hegel, reformulated: «What appears is good; what is good appears» (Debord, 2014, para. 12). There can be no form of spectacle *against* capital. This is why organized, televised and socialized revolts can play no radical drive for change. As part of spectacle, their possible emancipating power has already been neutralized. What's more, they're being performed under an aesthetic canon forged by mass culture. This is the V for Vendetta conundrum, as presented by Raffaele Alberto Ventura in *La guerra di tutti* (Ventura, 2019). The 2006 movie (based on the Alan Moore graphic novel of the same name) brought the paradox on a worldwide stage. Where does the Anonymous logo (the Guy Fawkes mask) come from? Isn't the quote "People should not be afraid of their government. Governments should be afraid of their people" a tagline to commercialize the movie? As Ventura brightly suggests, this is the first revolutionary slogan out of Hollywood.

It's as if the cultural industry is *over-performing* its cathartic function, leaving mimetic residuals along the way. This is a morbid form of governmentality: the anarchic possibility of a T.A.Z. (Bey, 2009) is easily neutralized when a revolt

¹³ «a perpetual and universal peace outside of history [...] although the practice of Empire is continually bathed in blood» (Hardt & Negri, 2016, p. xv).

starts looking like a movie or a role-playing game. Here, governmentality is in full effect. It is the neoliberal strength par excellence: not “how to say no” to those batteries menacing the polis, but on the contrary “how to say yes” circumscribing, neutralizing and valorizing the risks (my translation of (Ventura, 2019)). This echoes, on a certain sense, what McLuhan already said about Bologna's 1977 student riots – which he personally attended more than forty years ago¹⁴.

so long as we can't do without nuclear power plants and dismantling them remains a business for people who want them to last forever, aspiring to abolish the state will continue to draw smiles; so long as the prospect of a popular uprising will signify a guaranteed fall into scarcity, of health care, food or energy, there will be no strong mass movement (Comitè Invisible & Hurley, 2015, pp. 95–96)

What the *communist*¹⁵ theories suggest is that the only way out of spectacle is a series of practices of *non-submission* to it. It is to make use of everyone's real singularity. To never be identifiable and nameable. Every time a subjectivity is produced, it immediately falls within the realm of spectacle. Every State is eager to recognize any identitarian claim, even within its own identity¹⁶. The real menace is the non-identifiable, the singularity - una singolarità veramente qualunque (Agamben, 1991). «Freedom and surveillance, freedom and the panopticon belong to the same paradigm of government» (Comitè Invisible & Hurley, 2015, p. 126). The core of these neo-anarchic theories is clear – and definitive: «whatever is lost in partial confrontation becomes part of the repressive function of the old world» (Viénet, 1973). It is not by chance that this quote is taken from the surreal Situationist détournement movie *La dialectique peut-elle casser des briques?*, a self-conscious bitter irony on a project that is too important not to believe in, but too big to achieve. A great dystopic writer like George Orwell once wrote that «every revolutionary opinion draws part of its strength from a secret conviction that nothing can be changed» (Orwell, 2001, Chapter 10).

Eventually, we find ourselves with Camus, inverted: not «I rebel – therefore we exist» (Camus, 1961, Chapter 1) but «*we rebel – therefore I exist*».

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¹⁴ «A Bologna mi è sembrato di vedere una generazione che prima ha imparato a vivere con la televisione e più tardi a leggere e a scrivere» (Mezza, Amen, & Satta, 1997).

¹⁵ Etymologically intended.

¹⁶ It does so exactly because what it cannot tolerate is the *possibility* of a *vis-a-vis* confrontation with another power.

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