

Fictions of the “As Not”: Messianic vocations of the common for a world beyond work and aesthetics

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ABSTRACT: This text traces the survival of St Paul messianism at various different landmarks in political philosophy, social activism and contemporary art practices. It takes the critical reconsideration of the concept of class as its starting point, showing us how it left behind the egalitarian universalism of the radical and interracial policy of early modernity (the transoceanic proletariat) to become a stable and discriminatory identity (the national working classes) designed to address the conflict between capital and labour. From this perspective, the second part of the article analyses the way in which recent social movements, inspired by the operaista rejection of Fordist work, are trying to go beyond the structural configuration of modern experience in which work and aesthetics have a key function.

KEY WORDS: messianism, class, political exclusion, living labour, aesthetics, state of emergency.

PLEASE NOTE: UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED, ALL BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES REFER TO THE SPANISH TRANSLATIONS. WHERE POSSIBLE, LONGER QUOTES HAVE BEEN REPRODUCED FROM THE ORIGINAL VERSION.

“Gettare il proprio corpo nella lotta” (1)

Messianism, class and political exclusion

In the sessions of a seminar dedicated to St Paul’s Letter to the Romans, later compiled in the book *The Time That Remains*, Giorgio Agamben revisits the part of St Paul’s texts in which the apostle ordered all those who had a wife, all those who cried, the happy, those who bought things and those who enjoyed the world, to live life “as not” (hos me) having a wife, as not crying, as not happy, as not owning anything and as not taking advantage of the world. The messianic vocation (*klesis*), understood as the revoking of all other vocations, would turn the called one into a “slave of the Messiah”, an integral member of a future messianic community (*ekklesia*). Selecting this figure of the slave to invoke the messianic was not a coincidence. By using a body that did not strictly belong to him, the slave – both subject and instrument of the action, at the same time – kept within this reduction to bare life (*zoé*) the redeeming promise of the most radical liberating gesture: that which put the use of oneself (*chresis*) ahead of ownership structures and the productivist or teleological projections of human activity. Most surprising of all was the Italian philosopher’s following suggestion. Agamben looked into the way by which the concept of “class” in the first Marx had invoked that same messianic *klesis*, when conceptualising the proletariat as that “complete loss of man” which, far from being a mere descriptive sociological subset, in fact threatened to break the “radical chains” that so imprisoned them, in order to become a disruptive force within any social hierarchy. That “class of civil society that is not a class of civil society, of a *Stand* which is the

disbandment of all the *Stände*” would become universally relevant, insomuch that their suffering was shared by all of humanity. The proletariat did not demand “any particular right, because upon them no particular injustice has been exerted, but rather absolute injustice”, whereby their emancipation also entailed that of society as a whole (Agamben, 2006, 37-42).

This messianic contiguity between slave and proletariat would later be broken by the latter’s conversion into a substantial social category, i.e. the working class. Although this operation was the outcome of a strategic manoeuvre which helped shape the historical dialectic between the bourgeois and the working class, characteristic of industrial capitalism in the colonial metropolises, it also resulted in affording the “contingent figure of the proletariat [...] a true social identity of their own” which would ultimately lead to the loss of their “revolutionary vocation”. Despite the fact that the messianic aspect of class is present in all of Marx’s output, the Trier-born philosopher did not manage to solve the problem implied by this giving substance to the working class, which in time would be useful for the economic, tradeunionist and social democratic interpretations of Marxism. Far from challenging the work-capital relationship, these interpretations looked favourably upon the structural framework as defined by the new salary-based nature of productive relations, with their ultimate aim contained within this framework. The evolution itself of Marxian thinking should not be considered as separate, in this sense, from the process which led to the constitution of the national working classes throughout the 19th century. The excerpt cited by Agamben comes from one of Marx’s first texts, the *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (1843), published at a time when these classes were in the process of being formed, a far cry from the consolidation that they would go through in later decades, i.e. those in which the founder of historical materialism would put forward his key contributions towards a critique of the political economy. The war of movements that characterised these formative processes of the working classes, like the English working class, had resisted the use of the incarcerating and exploitative measures of industrial-scale production. This reticence to assimilate the wage-social-relationship was linked with the still-clear memories of a cultural past and a “moral economy”, both distinguishing features and thus common to the “horizontal sort of beast” forged during the dawns of capitalism(2). It was no coincidence that the moral imposition of discipline and the maximisation of working times, intrinsic to the new mode of production, were “prelude to the quite sharp attack upon popular customs, sports and holidays which was made in the last years of the eighteenth century and the first years of the nineteenth” (Thompson 2000, 434). Only as the 19th century went on, and with the progressive forgetting of the previous century, due to the generalisation of industry and the urbanisation of the English masses, would it be possible to identify that subordinate subject within a fixed image of the working-class. This process would contribute in the rerouting of social struggles towards the terrain of a positional war in the dialectic between work and capital, but it would also help determine an understanding of the working class that would evade the more primitive side of the anticapitalist conflicts.

Within this wide range of tensions, it is worth noting how even the materialist historians who, during the second half of the 20th century, promoted a constructivist or procedural (and, therefore, neither essentialist, nor messianic) understanding of class, did not more emphatically highlight the sheer importance of the slavery problem and how it was sidelined in the development of the first workers’ movement. The case of E.P. Thompson is significant. Diametrically opposed to any notion which may dehumanise or over-theorise, his pioneering study, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), defined the gradual development of class consciousness between 1790 and 1832 as “a historical phenomenon”, multi-faceted in nature and based on relationships and experiences, and which was thereby not reduced to mere category or structure:

The finest-meshed sociological net cannot give us a pure specimen of class, any more than it can give us one of deference or

of love [...] And class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs (Thompson 2013, 27).

The source of this phenomenon can be pinpointed to the appearance of the first corresponding societies, among which the London Corresponding Society played a crucial role. It was created in January 1792 to push for parliamentary reform, and it was run by a Scottish shoemaker, Thomas Hardy (3). Thompson did not, however, highlight certain key aspects which help further understand the other side of this modern formation of class. The first is related to how these societies, despite the emerging desire therein to bring together “innumerable members”, strategically decided to ignore the calls for the abolishment of the slave trade in the British colonies, forming thus a tension between the recognition of workers’ rights and the evoking of national sovereignty, with political ramifications which remain to this day (4). Despite recognising the visionary contribution made by Thompson and other historians from the Communist Party of Great Britain, in their imagining of a Marxism which is not “reductive in terms of social, economic and cultural history”, as well as the groundbreaking works of Raymond Williams, Paul Gilroy strongly criticised the nationalism and ethnocentrism which permeated the early days of English cultural studies. Both authors’ approaches to the “radical and laudible varieties of English cultural sensibility” tended to presuppose that these were “produced spontaneously using their own internal and intrinsic dynamic”. Going against this interpretation, Gilroy set out to understand “the subordinate nationalisms and the most heroic English countercultural patriotisms [...] as the product of a pattern of antagonistic relationships with the supranational and imperial world” (Gilroy, 2014, 24-25). Gilroy, the son of Guyanese novelist Beryl Gilroy, supposed that this approach would allow for new perspectives on the work of authors like William Blake.

To offer a chronotopic parallel, in the same year that Gilroy’s essay on “The Black Atlantic” appeared, Thompson’s final book was published, a monograph on Blake. In this book, Thompson traces the influence of antinomianism on the work of the English poet and illustrator. Antinomianism, which took its name from its followers’ refusal to accept the Moral Law stated in the Gospel, had come to light in parallel with the protestant reform and it later pervaded the rebellious tone of the social movements which were born of the English revolution in the 17th century. Taking inspiration from excerpts of St Paul’s letters to the Romans and the Galatians, sects like the Ranters or the Muggletonians, in being reluctant to recognise private property, had placed the law’s validity against the freedom and sovereignty of grace and faith, which, in their bodies, became the messianic presence of divinity incarnate (Thompson, 1993). Thompson’s innovative contribution, however, reflected this national historical line of radical culture, putting off any possibility of connecting those excerpts from St Paul and the antinomist practices with the existence of a transnational proletariat made up of, among other agents, black slaves, whose impact on Blake’s imaginary has been analysed elsewhere by other historians. Blake saw the Revolution of the Thirteen Colonies as a conflict of slave liberation, and its influence would reach England (Albion) itself. In his book *America* (1793), he cried to “let the slave grinding at the mill run out into the field: Let him look up into the heavens & laugh in the bright air” (Luchaker, 2001, 105-106) (5). Later, Blake would design the etchings to illustrate Captain John Stedman’s book *The Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam in Guiana, on the wild coast of South America* (1796), who had seen in the Caribbean, in person, the torturing of rebel slaves by their masters.

In a research project called *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker go several centuries back in time, further back than where Thompson’s work begins with the emergence of the English working class, to try and show how this mythological beast had been associated with the appearance of an Atlantic proletariat which threatened to hinder the Hercules of capitalism and its gradually accumulating processes. That proletariat had been characterised by the alliance of interests in race and

social class, their national and geographical origin, diverse and, due to the gender divide, somewhat less notable than that which would be implied, later, in the newly salary-based nature of social relations (6). Linebaugh and Rediker noted that the rebellion of the black slaves in Haiti in 1792 had a profound effect on the fragmentation of that transnational and interracial proletariat:

The London Corresponding Society [...] was founded in early 1792 in discussion of “having all things in common” and committed to equality among all, whether “black or white, high or low, rich or poor. The unity of race and class concerns, however, soon began to fragment. When the Corresponding Society stepped politely into the civic realm on April 2, 1792, its official statement made no mention of slavery, the slave trade, or the commons [...] By August 1792, the L.C.S. was defining its constituency and its aims among inhabitants of Great Britain: “FELLOW CITIZENS, Of every rank and every situation in life, Rich, Poor, High or Low, we address you all as our Brethren.” No more “black and white” here: equality of race had disappeared from the society’s agenda. What had happened? The answer, in a word, is Haiti (Linebaugh and Rediker 2005, p.274).

The slave revolution, led by Toussaint L’Ouverture in April 1792, shook the ideological foundation of the ethnocentric historical conscience with such force that it helps to explain both the Hegelian focussing on the dialectic between master and slave in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) (Buck-Morss, 2008) and the omission of Haiti from the accounts on the independence processes in Latin America, instigated by the creole elites of European origin (Grüner, 2010). Within the English context, Haiti meant that race, the invention of which had been useful in terms of the processes of primitive accumulation, would become a controversial topic and which, therefore, was better kept off the political agenda. The two elements (slavery and communal land) rejected by the Corresponding Society would let in, however, through the back door, the dual alienation that would accompany the working class as they underwent the shift towards generalisation, and – in a parallel ideological operation – the historic naturalisation of salaried work. Firstly, in terms of the body, the alienation resulting from the manufacturing regimes of production and the commercial regimes of distribution; secondly, in terms of nature, which definitively became an object ripe for exploitation by capitalist agriculture, with all the ecological consequences, as various different 19th century thinkers, including Marx himself, would warn (Bellamy Foster, 2004).

This strategic removal would find its micropolitical parallel in the breaking down of the friendship that brought together Thomas Hardy with his wife Lydia Hardy and the former slave and sailor Olaudah Equiano, an African of black descent. The three of them shared a house in Covent Garden between August 1790 and February 1792. There, Equiano put together the fourth edition of his book *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African*, a call for the abolishment of slavery. As Linebaugh and Rediker stress, the three of them remembered the times in which common goods were still around. Lydia had seen how the new sex-based division in work meant that her gender role was restricted to the private sphere (7). However, that did not stop her from getting involved in the abolitionist campaigns. The separation of these friends would accelerate further following the founding of the London Corresponding Society. Equiano would abandon the movement due to its dwindling support for the demands for racial equality. Lydia, for her part, died during childbirth in 1794, after being harassed by her husband’s enemies, defenders of the Church and the king, who had accused him of high treason before imprisoning him in the Tower of London. A poem in her honour was published that same year by Richard Lee Citizen, founding member and first treasurer and secretary of the society .

Living labour, aesthetics and state of emergency

The quantitative and geographical spreading of the wage-social-relationship meant that the “free workers” who made up the national working classes moved away from a relationship with their own body that was similar to that of a slave. Inasmuch that the workforce gradually turned into a commodity, subject to monetary transactions, and later union negotiations, the “free worker” of industrial capitalism was becoming, via this legal fiction, the owner of said workforce,

thus establishing a new, distinctive connection with their body. Although Marx did appear, at times, to accept such fiction in his critique of the classic political economy, in the evolution of his thinking a series of categories can be found which demonstrate both the survival of messianism in the conception of class (in terms of its potential for a radical and non-exclusive levelling-out) and in the resistance to the workforce's being turned into a commodity. Thus, in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844, the "generic being" alluded to the productive substrate common to human corporality, subverted by the process of expropriation so intrinsic to early capitalism's primitive accumulation and the private hoarding of means of production, whose ultimate consequences were the taking away of the products made by the same worker and the alienation that they would experience in terms of their body and their activity. Years later, in *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy or Grundrisse* (1857-1858), Marx defined as "living labour" that which was yet to be objectified and which, therefore, referred to a living subject, as opposed to dead labour. The conceptualisation of work as living labour went against the conversion of the workforce into a commodity, and it pointed to an interpretation of that historical process as a result of the global extension of the capitalist relations of (bio)power.

Living labour therefore refers to a stage in proceedings before its being subsumed as abstract human work, a process that would co-opt the universal potentiality of the generic being under the general nature of the the wage-social-relationships of production. Marx characterised living labour as "pure subjectivity" and "absolute poverty", definitions that are close to the understanding of "class" in Agamben. This also explains the presence of this concept in the texts by authors, such as Enrique Dassel, who have considered the philosophy of liberation centred on Latin America, away from Eurocentric teleologies, and rescuing the poor (yet another figure excluded by the founding of the worker's movement) from the deep wells of history. Other authors, like Toni Negri, have reflected on living labour as the origin of political agency, basing this on its ability to favour subjects' and groups' self-valorisation, via new ways of social cooperation (9). In recent political and artistic activism, these forms of social cooperation have led to the creation of a series of "temporary autonomous zones" (or TAZ, to use Hakim Bey's terminology). Despite their diversity, an element common to many of them is their willingness to respond to the post-totalitarian and post-political closing of history. In blurring the boundaries between the political and the artistic, the rejection of Fordist work from the *operaista* tradition has been reformulated in the opening of spaces removed from the separation itself of art's aesthetic regime. Being situated beyond the *terra aethetica*, these spaces make up a visual corporality (bodies becoming images, images becoming bodies) that resists the accumulative abstraction of images that comes with the cultural industry, but that has also made clear where the limits lie, beyond the confines of the space-time continuum, for making any true state of emergency effective, i.e. that which Walter Benjamin demanded against the state of emergency suffered, as a rule, by the tradition of the oppressed (X). This insufficiency has come from the difficulties and conflicts implied by removing the structural bases from the organisation of work, that which still sets the guidelines for the mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion in the worldwide capitalist system, and within which the remaining glimmers of social activism run the risk of being reduced to insular, exceptional and sublimate bursts of the common.

In the dialectic perspective I put forward in this essay, we could invoke in an image the mode by which this aesthetic distance appears to us today as the enclosure of common terrains that returns in the form of spectacular commodities. Alienation from nature, without which any explanation of climate change and the ecological "crisis" are not very convincing, must be considered as a substantial part of a process which, throughout capitalist modernity, has accompanied alienation from our own bodies. In this great field of problems, some authors have highlighted that, before becoming associated with judgments of taste, aesthetics was conceived by the first modern aesthetes, in a classic sense, as *aisthesis*, that is, as the way in which we experience our sense-relations with the world in general, and not solely with art (Buck-Morss, 2005, 169-221). Terry Eagleton noted that, in Baumgarten, aesthetics was postulated as a science of the senses, to help compensate for the conceptual excesses of Cartesian thought (Eagleton 2011, 65). What perhaps remains to be discussed is whether the modern focussing on aesthetics called into question the origins and historical

foundations of that arbitrary division of the human experience. In one key study, Sylvia Federici suggested the need to situate the mental emphasis of the Cartesian conception of the subject in the sexual division of labour so imposed by capitalism's primitive process of accumulation (Federici 2010, 170-218). The mechanisation of the body as a means for production and its conversion into the container of the workforce both ran in parallel with the demonisation and witch-hunting of women who refused to turn their bodies into mere reproductive instruments for said workforce. From this perspective, the body's aesthetic salvation tends to emerge as the sublimation of that part of the social, sexual, racial and international divide of the sense-experience of the world which, in the private (non-democratic) sphere of plantations, factories and households, sustained the processes of capital accumulation, thus leaving this divide unchanged. The disciplinary regulations of salaried work were camouflaged under the white aesthetic male's libidinal projections, along with the ways of life thereby excluded, and the modern origins of the state government. It might well be worth looking into the roots of modern aesthetics, to trace its links with the origin of classical political economics and with the creation of a corporal subjectivity in which enlightened modernity, capitalist expropriation and colonial reason were brought together. Such research would allow aesthetics, as well as its aforementioned links with epistemology and morality, to be placed in the era of the rise of social engineering, whose splendour – which came before the recognition of the natural sciences and technology as symbols of modernity's advancement – coincided with the formation of the English working class (11).

Coda

That which has been thus set forth refracts the images which, at the height of the Cold War, were taken by filmmakers like Guy Debord or Pier Paolo Pasolini from the struggles for the decolonisation of Africa in film-essays like *Critique of Separation* (1961) or *La Rabbia* ("Rage", 1963). In them, blackness was considered in terms of its omission from the configuration of the political subjects in western modernity, a kind of hope which goes against the integration of the middle and working classes into the post-Fordist machine of consumer societies and welfare states, resulting from the constitutionalisation of the pacts between capital and work after World War II. For Debord, Africa offered alternative life models whose effect on the body could be seen as compromised by the spectacular media coverage of the "distance organized between each and every one". The narrator's critical voice was the final call for "that clandestinity of private life regarding which we possess nothing but pitiful documents". Pasolini, in turn, would later set some of his scripts in that same geographical-political landscape. In *Notes Towards an African Orestes* (1970), black subalternity was shown as a cultural transposition of the tragic dilemmas faced in a classical Greece in decline, during the final vestiges of class resistance and neocapitalist standardisation. In 1963, the year in which *La Rabbia* was released, Pasolini had written a script called *Il padre selvaggio* ("The Savage Father") for a film set in sub-Saharan Africa, which was never filmed due to what the Italian director went through following the release of *La ricotta* (1963), and which would only be published in 1975. The emergence of Africa as the "sole alternative" for a revolution to enlighten future democracy had already been declared by Pasolini with "black rage of poetry" in the verses of "Fragment of Death", included in *La religione del mio tempo* ("Religion of my time", 1961). In *Il padre selvaggio*, that democracy acquired forms of autonomy, self-government and self-criticism with which the primary school teacher described the association he proposed his pupils create, and in whose first session they debated subjects like the Bandung Conference or the "role of the woman in the social and cultural revolution" (Pasolini 1995, 36-37). The school teacher is presented in the text as a kind of idealist super-ego (and not exempt from paternalism) of Pasolini himself, a European apostle who, having been rejected by the West, takes this good news about African democracy to the black children who embody that very future. As the script develops, however, we can see how the neo-colonial and inter-ethnic conflicts hinder these expectations, generating great malaise in Davidson, the student in whom the teacher had placed his hope. The return of the savage powers that devastate Davidson's imagination after participating in the crimes committed by his community is eventually channelled into a poem that gives a kind reconciliation for both teacher and pupil.

In view of the anarchy that he detected in the true workings of bourgeois society, Pasolini would shape a distinct institutional messianism in the script of another unmade film about the life of St Paul (12). The “poetic idea” of the film consisted of taking the known facts about the apostle to the contemporary world, inscribing the topicality of his word into events and cities on both side of the Atlantic. The inspiring side of St Paul’s sermon, in terms of combating bourgeois conformity, could be found in the practicing of a faith which, in time, had been shifted from the initial formation of a community of believers (*ekklesía*) to its institutionalisation as the Church. The parallels with modern communism and the creation of the avant-garde parties was explicit (13). St Paul’s ability to bring together contemplative and active life had been confirmed in his skills as an organiser, as well as in the transit from holiness to priesthood as implied by the membership requirements. Upon analysing Pasolini’s script, Alain Badiou noted the tragic tension coming from the “inner treachery” which, in both the conditions of the Roman Empire and in modern capitalism, entails the need to protect holiness over history, amid the severity and authoritarianism of the partisan organisation (Badiou 1999, 40-41). This is perhaps the challenge of the contemporary anticapitalist struggles: to come up with ways of organising which allow one “to live in the messiah”, and which add a new dimension to force of the event in question (which, ultimately, will always slip away as excess or leftover) without succumbing to the paralysis of partisan and hierarchical organisation. If the attack on the state machinery’s stormy skies does not go hand-in-hand with the further expanding of autonomous spaces, and with the profound democratisation of the institutions and public powers, this would still be useful in terms of the reproduction of capital.

In Pasolini’s reconstruction, the vocation had called Paul as he fled from Nazism, following his crossing of the border between France and Catalonia. This excerpt from the script immediately evokes the final throes of a similarly 20th century sensibility, i.e. Walter Benjamin. The last chapter of Agamben’s book, which we brought up at the beginning of this essay, considered the influence of St Paul’s epistles on the “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, trying to reveal the identity of the “hunchbacked theologian” hiding in the chess table described in the first thereof (Agamben 2006, 135-142). The “weak messianic power” evoked by Benjamin when conceptualising the conciliatory relationship with the past, exactly as it appeared to the materialist historian, refers to the passage from the Letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor.12, 9-10), in which the messiah responded to Paul, when he had asked him to remove a thorn which had stuck into his flesh, that “power is made perfect in weakness”. This statement perhaps allows us to consider the fragility and precariousness of current global resistance movements in words which re-read the Spinozist paradigm of bodies’ power away from the productivist conception of desire (Butler 2010, 52). If the vulnerability of a nobody (and not that of a militant’s protective shield) must be that they finally update the “secret connection between previous generations and our own”, the further focus on the ethics of care, the reversing of ecological harm, the creation of non-alienated forms of sensibility and the extension of cooperative networks of production should be the elements that value not only public policies which, by means of the universal basic income and the reducing of the working day, could allow us to move forwards to a post-work society (Weeks 2011), but also those bodies’ forms of exposure that reveal, when staring into the face of danger, a world beyond aesthetics.

Just a few months ago, Franco Berardi “Bifo” cited the enormous failure of social movements’ emancipating expectations in the chronological and political distance between “Black Power” and “Black Lives Matter”; between the revolutionary slogan of black power and the biopolitical assimilation of the struggles to one that claims to start with the reduction of the existence in bare life (Berardi 2016). We should perhaps avoid this type of comparison, often infused with the illusion of a fully-functioning political life. Without falling into the dialectic temptation of “the worse, the better”, it would involve accepting that radical political democracy should start right there: at the *zoé*, at bare life, at the final links in the forms of racial, sexual, gender- and class-based oppression, ever tangled in the chain of the production of value. In an article published on 18th November 1966, Pasolini confessed that his contact with the black movement in New York had brought to his mind the days of the Resistance: that partisan culture which, despite its antinomies and moralisms, embodied in its

chaotic and multifarious character the promise of another world (Pasolini 2005, 202-211). The Italian poet and filmmaker made the North American new left's *dictum* his own, i.e. that which invited "throwing the body into the fight". Here he saw the other side of the normalisation of the workers' conflicts in European territory, where the communist parties and the unions had given up on any furthering of the revolution. That would have implied the socialisation of power between workers, to respond to a discomfort that would not long after be expressed in the emergence of the autonomous working classes. New York's black "anti-community" expressed, for Pasolini, that "sort of love [...] born between them, just as happened among the partisans", somewhere between a demand for civil rights and a social fight which entails the mix of desperation and hope that makes up all political revolutions. For Pasolini, after the episodes in Algeria and Cuba, the focal point for the fight for revolution in the Third World had moved to the United States. Democratic radicalism and the "total and anarchic" response did not however reach as far as was hoped. Prophesising, Pasolini noted the difficulties experienced by the black movement in going beyond its own demands and towards a class struggle which would incorporate poor white people. The article, a kind of rebellious cry, concluded thus:

Here is the new motto of real, not annoyingly moralistic, commitment. Throw your body into the fight. . . . Who among writers in Italy, in Europe, is pulled by such desperate forces of contention? Who feels this necessity to oppose as an original necessity, believing that it is new in history, absolutely meaningful, and replete with both death and the future?

Notes

- 1 Chant of the black Resistance movement in New York, cited by Pier Paolo Pasolini in his article "L'America di Pasolini", published in *Paese Sera* on the 18th November 1966.
- 2 The concept of the masses' "moral economy", and the characterisation of the pre-industrial English proletariat as a "horizontal sort of beast" were so illustrated by E.P. Thompson in the essays that make up his book *Customs in Common* (Thompson, 1991).
- 3 By 1795, the organisation had reached 3000 active members, who contributed with a small weekly fee, and who were split into different sections. The London society was the centre of a network of correspondence with similar societies established in other cities on the island.
- 4 The roots of the refugee "crisis" and the reduction of the immigrant to the "bare life" of the *Homo Sacer* can be traced back to this modern logic of national sovereignty.
- 5 In the previously cited book, Gilroy traced the influence of Blake in the novel by the Afro-American abolitionist Martin R. Delany, i.e. *Blake or The Huts of America*, written between 1859 and 1862, in which he brought to life the travails of a Cuban sailor who, after living as a slave, goes back to Africa with the aim of leading a slave revolt in his country of birth. Delany's Blake would include, in Gilroy's opinion, an anti-ethnic, diasporic and pan-African version of black solidarity, which would turn this subject into a political issue instead of a common cultural identity (Gilroy 2014, 46).
- 6 Both authors emphasised the fact that during the 19th century there was a symbolic inversion by which capitalism started to become identified with the image of the hydra, introducing thus a configuration of the imaginary whose effects can still be observed in today's revolutionary movements. In May last year, the "Caracol" (autonomous Zapatista community) in Oventic organised a seminar called "Critical thought against the capitalist hydra". The audio can be accessed (in Spanish) here: http://radiozapatista.org/?page_id=13233. It would be worth speculating about the role played in this inversion by the Herculean stabilisation of the working class, as an identifying feature
- 7 Regarding the question of gender, the epic narration on the formation of class in Thompson articulated, first and foremost, the voices of the male subjects, tending therefore to silence the work carried about by women, reduced to the domestic tasks of reproducing the workforce. The feminist critique on this aspect of British social history refers to the book by Joan Wallach Scott called *Gender and the Politics of History*, and in particular the chapter "Women

in *The Making of the English Working Class*” (Wallach Scott 2005, 95-123). Although she did not want to take away from Thompson’s historiographical contribution, this author extended her critique, from a position in favour of historical linguistic change, not only to the strong male wilfulness as described by the English historian, but also to the historical framework itself of political exclusion which would have allowed for the emergence of class. For Scott, this emergence would not have existed without that framework. We consider that, in this point, Scott’s critique does not do justice to the opening out of a time-spanning and pluri-spacial understanding of the historical category of class which leads to Thompson’s non-deterministic (but not merely discursive either) viewpoint and which, in the previous points, we have contrasted with a messianic concept of class which works against and not based on these exclusions. For Thompson, class is, above all, class struggle, and it does not require the precedence of a conscience which, probably, did acquire specific connotations in its industrial configuration on the inside of the different nation states. If the English historian had pondered the existence of a class struggle without class, in terms of 18th century pre-industrial England, we could perhaps today describe the world’s current problems as a class struggle after class consciousness. The most refined definition of the concept of class in Thompson’s work can be found in Thompson (1984), in particular the essay “Class struggle without class?” where he states: “This emphasizes, however, that class, in its heuristic usage, is inseparable from the notion of ‘class-struggle’. In my view, far too much theoretical attention (much of it plainly a-historical) has been paid to ‘class’, and far too little to ‘class-struggle’. Indeed, class-struggle is the prior, as well as the more universal, concept. To put it bluntly: classes do not exist as separate entities, look around, find an enemy class, and then start to struggle. On the contrary, people find themselves in a society structured in determined ways (crucially, but not exclusively, in productive relations), they experience exploitation (or the need to maintain power over those whom they exploit), they identify points of antagonistic interest, they commence to struggle around these issues and in the process of struggling they discover themselves as classes, they come to know this discovery as class-consciousness. Class and class-consciousness are always the last, not the first, stage in the real historical process” (37). And later: “We shall expect to find class struggle but we need not expect to find nineteenth-century cases of class. Class is a historical formation, and it does not occur only in ways prescribed as theoretically proper. Because in other places and periods we can observe ‘mature’ (i.e. self-conscious and historically developed) class formations, with ideological and institutional expression, this does not mean that whatever happens less decisively is not class.” (39). <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03071027808567424?needAccess=true>

8 The poem, called “On the Death of Mrs Hardy, wife of Mr Thomas Hardy, of Picadilly, imprisoned in the Tower for High Treason”, called for, in its first verses, the liberation of the slaves. It can be accessed via this link from the British Library: <http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/on-the-death-of-mrs-hardy-a-radical-pamphlet>.

9 Each one of them dedicated a specific work to the analysis of the *Gründrisse* (Dussel 1985 and Negri 2001).

10 This “true state of emergency” should be understood in relation with the concept of divine violence as described by Benjamin in *Towards a critique of violence* (1921). Divine violence would be opposed to the instrumental understanding of violence as the founder or conserver of the right and the power, and Benjamin associated it with certain events like the myth of the “general proletarian strike” described by Sorel. Unlike the “general political strike” that aspired to modify work conditions without changing the social relationships of production, with an anarchist streak, he expressed the will to radically reorganise the concept of work, placing it away from violence operated by the state (Benjamin 1998, 36-37).

11 Karl Polanyi situated the end of this glorious period for social science in 1832 and, more precisely, in the parliamentary Reform Act in England: “Social not technical invention was the intellectual mainspring of the Industrial Revolution. The decisive contribution of the natural sciences to engineering was not made until a full century later, when the Industrial Revolution was long over. To the practical bridge or canal builder, the designer of machines or engines, knowledge of the general laws of nature was utterly useless before the new applied sciences in mechanics and chemistry were developed [...] The triumphs of natural science had been theoretical in the true sense, and could

not compare in practical importance with those of the social sciences of the day. It was to these latter that the prestige of science as against routine and tradition was due, and unbelievable though it may seem to our generation, the standing of natural science greatly gained by its connection with the humane sciences. The discovery of economics was an astounding revelation which hastened greatly the transformation of society and the establishment of a market system, while the decisive machines had been the inventions of uneducated artisans some of whom could hardly read or write. It was thus both just and appropriate that not the natural but the social sciences should rank as the intellectual parents of the mechanical revolution which subjected the powers of nature to man.” http://inctpped.ie.ufrj.br/spiderweb/pdf_4/Great_Transformation.pdf For Thompson, that year of 1832 also represented a threshold in the history of the British workers’ movement, which, following its consolidation, would undertake new forms of action in terms of the Chartist movement. The instrumental use of social science as a disciplinary regime (from Townsend to Bentham) must therefore be considered alongside the political unrest caused by the long cycle of decantation, formation and stabilisation of the first national working class.

12 The original typed work was called *Scene outlines for a film on St Paul (in the form of notes for a production manager)* and it was dated in Rome, between the 22nd and 28th May 1968. It was written, therefore, at the same time as the events which shook various part of the world that month. Pasolini would make some modifications to it in 1974, when it appeared that he would be able to make the film. In the end did not come to pass.

13 “Ours is an organized movement. . . Party, Church, call it whatever you want. Institutions have been established among us, who have fought and still fight against institutions. The opposition is in limbo. But in this limbo we already foresee the norms that will allow our opposition to become a strength that takes power, and this will be for everyone’s sake [...] Because we are not a redemption, but rather the promise of a redemption. We are founding a church” (Pasolini 1982, 98). https://archive.org/stream/The_Resurrection_of_the_body_Peir_Paolo_Passolini/The_Resurrection_of_the_body_Peir_Paolo_Passolini_djvu.txt

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