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Pierpaolo Ascari

THE ADVENTURE OF FORM

Aesthetics, Nature and Society

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AESTHETICS, NATURE AND SOCIETY

Pierpaolo Ascari



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Form and Ground

*Nous ne défendons pas la nature,
nous sommes la nature qui se défend*

ZAD of Notre-Dame-des-Landes

The parts of this book could be arranged with complete impunity around one of the brightest stars in the firmament of philosophy and aesthetic reflection. Moreover, that star does not merely suggest a hypothesis of thematic correlation between the individual parts, but raises the problem of their own tendency (as parts) to have always implied a recomposition. The reference is to Kant's third *Critique*, where the overall view is a preliminary condition to any fragment of knowledge and experience: if in the following pages it is possible to find a certain number of connections, it is also in relation to the problem that Kant meant to resolve by identifying a faculty that binds the exercise of the intellect to the latency of an organic framework. A framework without any content, as is well known, except precisely that of the propensity of each phenomenon to be first and foremost part of something. According to Kant, it is only by virtue of this propensity that we can enter into a relationship with the world, that we can feel and perceive it and that we enable it to mediate, through the feeling of pleasure, the experience of ourselves. This is not a requirement of the

world, since it does not fall within the phenomenal and mechanical horizon of knowledge, but an indispensable projection for the subject to establish contact with the evidence of any singularity. And it will be precisely to the release of this evidence that one of the first and most enthusiastic readers of the third *Critique*, Goethe, will immediately associate the notions of *form, morphology and metamorphosis*, pinpointing an opening which, through Kantian reflection, can lead to the topics we will discuss.

8 Once again it will be useful to refer to the moment in which Kant had to devise a way to reconcile the conclusions he had reached with the first two *Critiques*, to identify in the reflective judgment the faculty to connect the limits of the concept to the freedom of desire. In the aesthetic judgment this connection is associated with the free play between the formal involvement of intellect and the work of imagination, in the sublime the mathematical limitlessness or the dynamic power of nature are the ones who imply the belonging of man to a dimension further than that of the limit that they make available, while the teleological judgment cannot but go beyond the legality of knowledge every time it is impossible to proceed from causes to effects. It would seem that bringing together these three performances of subjective reality, is the discovery that our way of approaching it cannot avoid considering it a product in itself, that is, the outcome of a process which, while remaining unknown, must always refer to a more comprehensive explanation. It is to this preliminary and necessary reference that Kant gives the name of *purposiveness*, both in terms of the correlation between the individual parts that are characterized as parts of a harmonic whole, thus seemingly being involved in the mechanical production of its contingency (Cassirer, 2016a, p. 258), and in the sense of their tension towards the discovery of a concept that would make them finally objectifiable (§IV-V). In the absence of this tension, not only would the reflective judgment get lost in a series of antinomies, losing its regulative and heuristic function (§70), but the very possibility of knowing anything would disappear, since even the apodictic use of reason and the determinative judgment must anticipate a moment of indetermination that allows them to imagine the opportunity to subsume the parts to an already known

universal law (Deleuze, 1984, pp. 58-59). Therefore unlike what was presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, if indeed “every subsumption contains an aesthetically reflective passage” (Desideri, 2003, pp. 72-73), form will now designate a reflection of contingency in the imagination that invents or experiences the universal (Deleuze, 1984, p. 47), anchoring the third *Critique* to the idea that in the development of any kind of knowledge the imagination is not less necessary than the intellect, that is to say one of the transcendental preconditions – so to speak – of Goethe’s morphology (Cassirer, 1970, p. 98).

Ernst Cassirer spoke in this regard of a double tangency: the first, negative, for which both Kant and Goethe would limit themselves to consider art and nature as relationships, without ever objectifying them in the perspective of final causes; the second, positive, for which the role attributed by both to the form adheres to an ideal of knowledge that never poses the unrelated problem of ground, but identifies it with the formation and transformation of organic natures (pp. 67-68). To what he defines positive tangency, however, Cassirer would probably not be willing to make it undertake the hermeneutical twist that we are imposing on it, since while arriving at the qualification of a regulative and not constitutive purpose, which can therefore adhere to the dynamics of formal links, in Kant it would be difficult to deny schematism the programmatically unrelated function of ground. Unless we accept the proposal recently formulated by Catherine Malabou and allow the living being as an “intrusion of the non-transcendental into critical rationality” to retroact on the entire architecture of the system, as if the ground were led through the vicissitudes of a coming of age novel that only in the last pages forced it to admit that it had never been anything other than an “effect” or a “surface structure” (Malabou, 2020, pp. 72-76). That is, a place where things happen, without it being only the place (as an innate faculty) or things (involving a shift into empiricism) that determine the structure of the events. Thus, identified with the possibility of this happening and pushed to its maximum degree of immanence, the definition of transcendental can actually prelude to a programme that articulates the *limited* horizon of knowledge to the *free* contingency of forms: a taking-shape as a “surface”

interaction between the reflection that objects generate in the imagination and their exclusively regulatory tendency to activate in judgment the aspiration to a concept that will have made them known. Such an interpretation should clearly involve a much tighter work of analysis, but the point of this introduction is not to hastily establish what Kant really said, but to show the direction in which the individual insights collected in this volume could possibly be oriented towards. From this point of view, Deleuze and Malabou's interpretations seem to support the opinion that Goethe had already expressed about the relationship between the first and the third *Critiques*, as he recalls:

In the days when I was trying, if not to penetrate deeply, to make the most of Kant's doctrine, my impression, at times, was that the excellent man proceeded in a maliciously ironic way, now seemingly anxious to limit to a minimum our ability to know, now casting a sidelong glance beyond the boundaries set by himself. Likely it had not escaped him how much presumption and pedantry man displays when, armed with few experience, he immediately arrogates to make judgments and hastily claims to establish this or that, to saddle objects with the first thought that passes through his head. Therefore our Master limits the man who thinks to a logical and discursive form of judgment, denies him determinative judgment; but then, after having cornered or even exasperated us, he allows more liberal concessions to be wrested from him and allows us to make the use we want of the freedom that, in some way, he recognizes us (Goethe, 1983, p. 140).

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And if we allow the transcendental for a moment to correspond to a "surface effect", even Cassirer's Goethe is left with only the excellent reasons that led him to reflect himself without reserve in the reading of the third Critique. The same problem that in Kant would be represented by the danger of confusing reflective judgment with determinative judgment, attributing to nature a purpose that in reality remains the misleading synonym of what is free to happen, in Goethe's scientific research would be introduced by

the reference to an observation and classification criterion which risks being equally inhibitory and which corresponds to the notion of "type". A concept, explains Cassirer, which also retains all its importance in Goethe's biology, but only as long as its retraction is grasped. Because it is not a question of renouncing the recognition of what unites the objects of investigation, but of establishing that their commonality can be made manifest only in transformation. In other words:

We have life only in a colored reflection of life, and existence is not comprehensible or accessible to us except as it unfolds itself before us in change. This peculiar intermingling of being and becoming, of permanence and change, was comprehended in the concept of form, which became for Goethe the fundamental biological concept. Form is akin to type, but the geometrical fixity of the type is no longer suited to the form (Cassirer, 1950, p. 139).

Unlike what happens in reference to the application of the concept of type, which subordinates movement to the stability of permanent features, for there to be form it is essential to subordinate the manifestation of duration to the activity of changes. The form can be defined only in terms of taking-form, therefore, effectively reducing the type to "what the old man of Königsberg himself calls the *adventure of reason*" (Goethe, 1983a, p. 140) and which coincides precisely with the objective of the third *Critique*, to which Kant had entrusted the task of establishing what leeway to encroach on the limits imposed by the intellect was to be granted to human hope.

In fact, Kant writes:

The agreement of so many genera of animals in a certain common schema, which seems to lie at the basis not only of their skeletal structure but also of the arrangement of their other parts, and by which a remarkable simplicity of basic design has been able to produce such a great variety of species by the shortening of one part and the elongation of another, by the involution of this part and the evolution of another, allows the mind at least a weak ray of hope that

something may be accomplished here with the principle of the mechanism of nature, without which there can be no natural science at all. This analogy of forms, insofar as in spite of all the differences it seems to have been generated in accordance with a common prototype, strengthens the suspicion of a real kinship among them in their generation from a common proto-mother, through the gradual approach of one animal genus to the other, from that in which the principle of ends seems best confirmed, namely human beings, down to polyps, and from this even further to mosses and lichens, and finally to the lowest level of nature that we can observe, that of raw matter (§80).

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Therefore, to the hope that could transform into certainty, corresponds the contradictory tendency to confuse reflective judgment with a property of nature, a regulative principle with a constitutive principle, the analogy of forms with objective reality and the taxonomic classification of phenomena. But it is an absurd confusion, continues Kant, “by which is meant the generation of an organized being through the mechanism of crude, unorganized matter”, so as to render less absurd the adventure of reason induced to assume that an organization can be attributed even to crude matter (§80). At this point “the specific form was preformed virtualiter” (§81), but still in relation to a conception of finality as a category *a priori* of teleological judgment that cannot be produced in the truthfulness of scientific theories, such as preformationism, which associate a phenomenal and therefore objective definition to the form in potency. On the contrary, the way in which the functions of this internal form and its analogies will be understood in the development of critical philosophy is consistent with Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s epigenetic model, which involves an adherence to vitalism or an opening to the constitutive value of judgment that the third *Critique* does not admit (Lenoir, 1980; Look, 2006), but to which Kant acknowledges above all the merit of starting “all physical explanation of formations with organized matter”, that is to say from a supposition external to the laws of physics that coincides with the adventure of reason on which Goethe himself

does not hesitate to embark. And this is because Blumenbach too, writes Kant,

declares it to be contrary to reason that raw matter should originally have formed itself in accordance with mechanical laws, that life should have arisen from the nature of the lifeless, and that matter should have been able to assemble itself into the form of a self-preserving purposiveness by itself; at the same time, however, he leaves natural mechanism an indeterminable but at the same time also unmistakable role under this inscrutable principle of an original organization, on account of which he calls the faculty in the matter in an organized body (in distinction from the merely mechanical formative power [*Bildungskraft*] that is present in all matter) a formative drive [*Bildungstrieb*] (§81).

And here is how the living, as organized matter that stimulates reason to venture beyond the confines of reason, seems to lead the development of critical philosophy to the identification of life (the power of matter) with a tendency towards formation which together with the mechanisms of nature also informs their objective knowledge, reserving for it a role that cannot be determined but not even disowned. It is in this way that the third *Critique* can imply a backward action on the overall system of transcendental philosophy, subordinating the very possibility of knowing and experiencing the world to the analogous and baseless adventures of reflective judgment (Huneman, 2007, p. 91; Breitenbach, 2014). Which cannot help but approach a *natured nature* (*natura naturata*), that is to say one that is already provided with the reference to a universal container, but which precisely in the continuous manifestation of this limit must presuppose the no less regulatory activity of an autopoietic matter that is free to take form (Weibel, 2018): a *naturing nature* (*natura naturans*) whose tendency to formation is confirmed by the analogical and not apodictic structure (as if, *als ob*) of judgment itself (Richards, 2000, p. 31). Kant states this very clearly in reference to the idea of the supreme being:

Now in order to avoid a misunderstanding that can easily arise, it is most necessary to mention here, first, that we can *think* these properties of the highest being only by means of analogy. For how would we investigate its nature, nothing similar to which can be shown to us by experience? Second, that by means of this analogy we only think this being, and do not thereby *cognize* it and attribute anything to it theoretically... (§88).

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It is not possible to ground the analogy outside the analogical procedure, that is to say actively thinking according to analogy, which responds only to the desire that is expressed and takes shape through the *practice* of thought. In other words, “the analogical discourse is supported exclusively by the free decision that leads it” (Marty, 1989, p. 469), losing its validity at the exact moment in which it should be abandoned to a conclusion. Therefore, with reference to the objective of creating a bridge between the limits of knowledge and the freedom of desire, Jacques Derrida can legitimately argue that “the recourse to analogy, the concept and effect of analogy are or make the bridge itself [...]. The abyss calls for analogy – the active recourse of the whole *Critique* – but analogy plunges endlessly into the abyss as soon as a certain art is needed to describe analogically the play of analogy” (Derrida, 1987, p. 36). If on the one hand it is an effect that determines the importance of the analogy, just as the surface on which Malabou will see the transcendental happening is an *effect*, on the other hand it would seem that in Derrida a tension to the cogency of ground can continue to act, where the necessary recourse to “some art” is not evaluated in the new perspective of a free play between the intellect and the imagination that adheres more comprehensively to the dynamics of the three *Critiques*, but through the figure of the endless sinking, which laments a loss and restores the primacy of pure reason. That the analogy can only be explained analogically, on the contrary, could entail a transformation of the very idea of ground, imposing on it the “dynamically fluid form” which is resolved “in the purely conditional logic of presupposition” (Desideri, 2003, pp. 92-93). To the reflection on the living cannot but correspond a faculty no less unfounded, plastic and therefore living: this seems to me the

road on which criticism could actually encounter the interpretation that Goethe will give it, where the relationship between the subject and the object of morphology is resolved in the movement of a life that observes itself (Pinotti, 2013, p. 19). An encounter certainly complicated by the observation that “in order to examine what is – now – we must admit a previous activity” which risks dragging the study of nature into a theological dimension, but which can also be propitiated in a more earthly way by establishing that “when an organic being appears, the unity and freedom of the formative impulse [*Bildungstrieb*] are incomprehensible without the concept of metamorphosis” (Goethe, 1983b, p. 143).

To the same encounter, can then lead the story of the exorcisms that the era of the scientific revolution opposed to this concept. In the “long sixteenth century” we witness the unfolding of a new rationality which, making use of microscopes, experiments, metaphysics and theatrical works, contrasts the same tendency towards the mutability of forms which, according to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, still constituted the main argument confirming human greatness. That tendency will be averted in the first place by the theory of spontaneous generation becoming outdated and the emergence of preformism, two alternatives that in the *Methodology of the teleological judgment* will be defined by Kant as equally inadmissible. But in the meantime Racine will have banned the metamorphosis even from the repertoire of theatrical solutions and the continuous metamorphosis of the monad, in Leibniz, will have been entrusted to the superintendence of an eminent cause that had always pre-ordained them. I will address this war on the concept in the first chapter, the real stakes of which could be summarized by referring to the morphological tensions between the *formed form* (*forma formata*) and the *forming form* (*forma formans*), two categories that Cassirer defines precisely along the same lines of the scholastic distinction between *natured nature* and *nature naturans* or imply that in the distance between the past participle and the present participle there is the moment of transition “from what has become to the principle of becoming” (Cassirer, 2003, p. 54). And it is in this same perspective and for the value it can assume in the debates relating to the so-called anthropocene that my reconstruction will

be initiated by a reference by Marx to the subject that is “not to remain something he has become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming”.

With the next chapter I will try to *illustrate* the reasons that Marx could oppose to the way in which forms are conceptualized by Bruno Latour in his critique of the analyses on the fetishistic character of the commodity. It seems plausible to me to suspect Latour not only of having misunderstood Marx, but of anchoring this misunderstanding to the conviction that the *Capital* is part of a “long series” of correspondences to the paradigmatic gesture with which Kant would have made a clear separation between the pure form of the subject and the equally pure form of the noumenon. While the relationship between the first and third *Critique* established by Goethe seems to evoke the image of the Freudian primordial horde, because such would appear the scene in which the results of schematism devour its ground, with Latour’s interpretation we are standing before Dante’s count Ugolino, since only within the limits of pure reason is it possible to reduce matter to the thing in itself and form to structures that are always identical to themselves on which the subject of knowledge is constituted (Sgarbi, 2016, p. 94). The problem of teleology, on the contrary, is precisely that of separating the organized matter of the living (as Kant himself explains) from the general concept of matter, reserving a less passive role for the specific form in relation to the forces that determine it (*Bildungskraft*) to assign it the impure and adventurous consistency of the cause of itself, because this is when the contingency of the forms is defined by the impetus to the expression of their own form (*Bildungstrieb*) in relation to what some have called a “free cause” (Zumbach, 1984, p. 99). If Marx’s work is really to be included in the “long series” of compulsions to repeat Kant’s gesture, then, it is not in reference to the presumed survival of pure forms in the logic that presides over the analysis of the fetishistic character of the commodity, as Latour wrongly claims, but for an almost opposite reason: it is the conception of form relative to the organized matter of the living, in fact, which now seems to extend its coherence to the relationship with the general concept of matter in the perspective of historical materialism, where the precondition

of a crude matter, which is therefore separated from the historical and social forms that implement it, corresponds only to an ideological resource of the bourgeoisie.

On the contrary, for the materialist who would have been prepared to conceive “the evolution of the economic formation of society as a process of natural history”, the enigmatic character of the commodity can only refer to its own form (Marx, 1990). Not for nothing, as I will try to argue in the third chapter, it is precisely on the oppositions between inert matter and organized matter, pure act and impure act, force and form of life that the differences between Giovanni Gentile and Antonio Gramsci, as interpreters of the *Theses on Feuerbach* and the related notion of praxis, seem to insist on. If in the pages on the process of exchange Marx had already taken steps to grasp the limit of the reduction to “pure phenomenal form” and to attribute to it the “eighteenth-century” task of converting the social character of things into an arbitrary product of human reflection, Gramsci’s stance on the philosophical principles of Marxism offers the advantage of immediately reactivating a consonance between the Kantian-derived hypotheses upon which we are relying and their tendency to establish a possible dialogue with the contribution of political ecology and the notion of *historical nature* to the contemporary debate on climate change (Moore, 2014). The doctrine to which Marx’s heirs must refer, writes Gramsci, must not be “neither materialist nor idealistic monism, nor ‘Matter’ nor ‘Spirit’ evidently, but ‘*historical materialism*’, that is, human activity (history) in concrete terms, that is applied to a certain organized ‘matter’ (material forces of production), to ‘nature’ transformed by man” (Gramsci, 1996, pp. 176-177). A conclusion that would be important to acquire in a two-way street: not only is nature matter organized by man, that is to say “historical nature”, as Jason W. Moore would define it, but the matter organized by man can be identified with nature, that is considered natural, not so much or not only in the sense of organic nature (and this seems to me the meaning behind the quotation marks) but in that of a crude matter to which, however, still corresponds a specific organization, i.e. an internal form. In the second case it is a process that is completely faithful to the definition of the discipline provided by Marx

in the *Capital* and developed by Michel Foucault while working on *Discipline and Punish*, two contexts in which the work of the forms is expressly connected to the dynamics of the subject's constitution. In particular – and this is the topic of the fourth chapter – the terms in which Foucault poses this problem during the course at the Collège de France in 1971 are those of the relationship between form and destination, a topic that may prove to be important for understanding the transition from *Archaeology of Knowledge* to the adoption of a genealogical perspective that is not limited to accepting Nietzsche's lesson, but is also, probably, influenced by the way in which Étienne Balibar is interpreting in those same years the theme of the relationship between elements and structure in Marx's work.

Because even the "theory of transition", after all, poses the theme of the subject that "not to remain something he has become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming", a problem that in the more specific field of morphology, had already led to the profound revision of the notion of *type* operated by Goethe in personal and enthusiastic agreement with the third *Critique*. To the last three chapters of this volume, one could attribute the ambition of extending the gaze of morphology to the social formation processes of gender, class and race through the mechanical formative power (*Bildungskraft*) of photographic images. Two orders of classification and production of subjectivity, which are always united by the exorcism of what is changeable, *mobile* or which is a prelude to a combination: two types of living that still today exercise their violent grip on the living flesh of the nature that we are.

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Form and Metamorphosis

Expressing his opinion on the debates about the alarming health conditions of our planet, Jason W. Moore has consistently proposed that we consider the birth of the so called Anthropocene as commencing from *the long sixteenth century* (1450-1630). After all, it was then that as a result of early capitalism a “new mode presumed the separation of humans from the rest of nature” had to be created (Moore, 2017, p. 8). A separation that wouldn't be limited to isolating two already existing elements, but one that needed to establish them again as individual concepts, thus, creating a *human being* and a *rest of nature* which had previously never existed. Moore's hypothesis seems to be validated by a specific focus on the theme of metamorphosis, the cosmogonic principle to which Giovanni Pico della Mirandola associated the nobility and the essence of being human (Allen, 1997), questioning whether someone could possibly assert the contrary (*Quis hunc nostrum chamaeleonta non admiretur?*: Pico, 2012, p. 7). Less than two centuries later, that same principle would be considered so absurd, that it would have been out of place even in theatrical performances. I will therefore attempt to outline the history of this devaluation, in association with the disrepute that at the same time had befallen two other cornerstones of classical culture, zoomorphism and spontaneous generation, that evidently shared a common adherence to a

subject that “not to remain something he has become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming”, as written by Marx, where “in bourgeois economics – and in the epoch of production to which it corresponds – this complete working-out of the human content appears as a complete emptying-out” (Marx, 1973, p. 488).

In this perspective we owe to Pico a second hint about the sublunary sphere as “marked by water, a fluent and mutable substance” (Pico, 1996, p. 17), with which one should interpret “every material form” (p. 36). On the one hand, in fact, in the environment in which the man-chameleon lives, “while the matter is like the bed of the sea, there is an indefinite passage of shapes that come and go similar to the ebb and flow of the waves”, while on the other hand, “as for drops of water happiness consists in pouring themselves into the Ocean [...], so our happiness consists in one day being able to join that spark of intellectual light which is in us with the same primal intelligence” (p. 107; Garin, 2011, pp. 157-161). In other words, Pico establishes a close correlation between the element of metamorphosis and that of water, of which I would like to try understanding and documenting the developments. Because it would seem that despite the epoch in which “the beasts are within us, right in our entrails, so that we don’t have to go far to transmigrate in them” (Pico, 1996, p. 81), is about to set, the sea can equally continue roaring, bellowing or showing claws. After all, one of the Proto-Indo-European roots that would have remained in the Italian word *acqua* (water), is actually **ap*, which would literally mean “that which is animated”. And a quick review of the main cosmogonies that have alternated throughout history can only confirm the existence of a privileged link between the sea and the most radical and alchemical of all metamorphoses, that of the passage from non-existence to life. Thus, in the tales of the ancient Egyptians before creation the sun god lay on Nun, chaos in the form of a primordial ocean. The gods of ancient Babylon were born from the union of salt water (*tiamat*) and freshwater (*apsu*), while the Hindus believe that terrestrial creatures were generated in the sea. The story of the Judeo-Christian creation begins with the divine spirit that “hovers over the waters” and from water Allah would have created all living beings, according to the *Koran* (Jha, 2015). In the matter of

cosmogonies, then, even the most current findings of astrophysics research are no exception, according to these a moment before the solar system was formed, the water that is still inside our bodies today floated already in empty space. Life itself, that is to say, the passage from an inorganic substance to an organic compound would be determined within what Charles Darwin, in a famous letter dated February 1 1871 to his botanist friend Joseph Hooker, to his botanist friend Joseph Hooker, had defined a “some warm little pond”. Once developed by the Russian biochemist Aleksandr Ivanovich Oparin, Darwin’s intuition would find confirmation in the experiments of Stanley Miller and Harold Urey. Yet there is something of the ancient relationship between the sea and mutation (it was on a strip of beach *adluitur autem Aegaeo et Saronico mari* that the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleio ended) which conspicuously left the scene in the age of biochemists and astrophysics.

To understand this trend, it would not be completely useless to recall that the same year in which the second volume of *Don Quixote* is published in Madrid, Galileo writes the most cited of his four Copernican letters and Giovan Battista Della Porta dies in Naples. The gaze, enchanted by the industriousness of the forms and their ability to connect the *human being* to the *rest of nature*, would give the impression of capitulating to the scrutiny of what “sensible experience places before our eyes”, but only to take refuge in the imperturbable fixations of a poor mad mind. In this way, the writer would then be entrusted with the task of “becoming *anyone*, even the smallest, the most naïve, the most impotent” (Canetti, 1984, pp. 387-391), that is, to take custody of the same faculty of metamorphosis that Galileo is banning everywhere “apart from tides” (Latour, 2014, p. 3). Seven years earlier, in 1608, Rubens returned from Rome with the drawings that would have ensured zoomorphism a considerable influence in the history of painting and portraiture, but the representation of life that begins to allow itself to be searched in the depths of microscopes, programmatically renounces the ontological service of similarity. All that of taking shape anticipates or can elude the act of observation, is expelled from the universe of science to be buried in the discredit of subjective fantasies, where for a long time it will continue to exercise clandestinely, even in the

perverse ways of racism or misogyny. Yet the waters that with the epic of the great discoveries would give the impression of allowing themselves to be objectified by astronomical calculations and the on-board instruments appointed to govern them, continue to produce phenomena no less extraordinary than the sighting of a bull, a monkey or an owl on the face of the Renaissance man.

Sunken somewhere in the Mediterranean, after all, were the spells from which Prospero frees himself at the end of the *Tempest*, the last work entirely written by Shakespeare who from the first act, with a language “completely impregnated with alchemical spirit and the related idea of transformation” (Yates, 2001, p. 190) promises to be a not too isolated case of sea-change (I, 2, 403). And in this perspective, while the narration overturns the order of nature to make it correspond to the *rest* not included in the definition of *human being*, it is not entirely correct to argue that magical thinking is taking leave from a totally demystified world, but only from a temporary regeneration of the world in the no less numinous forms of disenchantment. In other words, it seems incorrect to say that Ariel, in the play, “not once in the play does Ariel act without specific order from Prospero” (Bloom, 1998, p. 681), because when the news arrives on the island that someone or something has incredibly repaired the castaways’ ship, the thesis of Harold Bloom is denied by a conversation that places a constitutive limit to the sovereignty of new knowledge. “Sir – reveals Ariel in Prospero’s ear – all this service have I done since I went”. “My tricky spirit!”, the master then replies (V, 1, 225-227), suggesting that if in this case the spirit was able to act on its own initiative and without carrying out a precise order, it can continue to do so in the future, once the owner has freed it.

A few years have passed since the day when a great expert on that same sea, author of the *Traicté de la verité des causes et effects, des divers cours, mouvements, flux, reflux et saleure de la Mer Oceane, Mer Mediterranee et autres Mers de la terre*, in a second book programmatically titled *Histoire admirable des plantes et herbes esmerveillables et miraculeuses en nature*, determined that if the leaves of some trees run out in water they turn into fish (Duret, 1605, p. 316). Because the sea is the factory of the world and to the

aquatic origin (*le commencement des eaux*) we owe all the answers that remove the concreteness of creation from the validation of observation (Duret, 1600, pp. 59-60). In the treatise of Claude Duret, thus, the adviser of Henry IV to whom these notations are owed, the sea is once again the place where the limits of knowledge are set, the *narrow river mouth* of Dante, the incongruity that in the *Quaestio de aqua et terra* forced him to recompose any argumentative fracture in a peroration of divine omnipotence (*desinant homines querere que supra eos sunt*). And it is precisely as a boundary, so that man will not further press on that the sea will continue to sway in Hobbes's political doctrine, on the scientific blunders of Professor Aronnax or in the latest conjectures of Mr Palomar. However, this boundary does not cease to maintain a peculiar relationship with the idea of change and the shifting flow of life forms, considering that it will be Ishmael to confess in the very first lines of *Moby Dick*:

Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off—then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can.

26

But while at the court of Henry IV the fruits of the trees are transformed into fish, amplifying the value of resemblance well beyond the limit of proof, in one of the ideal centers of the Copernican revolution, Padua, the waters are ingeniously pumped to the upper floors of buildings, where the only one who does not realize that times are changing seems to be Don Quixote, the persevering, the hero who in those new technologies would certainly not have hesitated to apostrophize a dragon or a chimera. Because "his whole journey is a quest for similitudes", to which, the real reason for their punctual denial is ironically attributed, when facts take it upon themselves to deny them. Indeed, if the pump remains a pump, if it does not obey the law of resemblance that would have allowed it to

transform itself into a dragon, Don Quixote does not resign himself to the *sensible experience* of experimental reality and in an attempt to find the prerequisite of the discrepancy “it is to be found in the transformations performed by magicians”. As Michel Foucault writes, “all the indices of non-resemblance, all the signs that prove that the written texts are not telling the truth, resemble the action of sorcery, which introduces difference into the indubitable existence of similitude by means of deceit” (Foucault, 2002, pp. 52-53). If in the age that just ended magic had served to juggle the sympathies of the world, then, now it can only explain in terms of delirium why analogies do not have any confirmation, precisely because thought ceases to move in the element of resemblance and similitude is no longer the form of knowledge, but the cause of the error. When he and Sancho face the famous adventure of the enchanted boat, thus, even if the tree to which they tied the animals is no more than two reeds away, Don Quixote declares that if he had an astro-labe, he would not struggle to prove that they are already sailing on the open sea. And he adds:

You don't know what colures, lines, parallels, zodiac signs, ecliptics, poles, solstices, equinoxes, planets, astrological signs, points of the compass, and measurements are, of which the celestial sphere and the terrestrial sphere are composed. If you knew all these things, or even some of them, you would see clearly which parallels we have crossed, or which signs of the Zodiac we've left behind, and which we're crossing right now (II, 39).

27

Don Quixote is crazy, because his boat continues to float near the exact point where they found it, that is, on the bank of a river, but he who had to resort to a precise lexicon to resign himself to the evident truth under his nose, would be no less crazy. And Cervantes seems to find an impossible synthesis between the madmen of Hyeronimus Bosch, who had embarked on navigation equipped only with roasts and mandolins, and the madmen of *Narrenschiff*, among which those who were looking for “joy and indubitable science” in the measurement of anything, are notable. The demon of measurement, the unbridled use of compasses that the

knight Cesare Ripa will dispense with equal determination to the allegorical figures of Mathematics, Judgment, Beauty, Art, Economy and Natural Law, would have benefited from the reporting of another remarkable coincidence.

In addition to those of Bosch and Sebastian Brant, in that same year of 1494 were, after all, the ships subservient to the new treaty of Tordesillas, the town in Castile where the pope's cosmographers had proceeded to regulate the possession of a world whose actual conformation they ignored still. This way, the waters would have once again the task of pushing the Matter, still fertile with legal approximations, to a gradual reform, of tilting the border of Portuguese domains more and more westward, of fragmenting the pre-emptive rights that the initiative of the Pope recognized only Spain and Portugal, to crystallize the interests of France, the Netherlands and England and to articulate to the cartography of Catholic gold, in essence, a supplement of forms not yet contemplated, but inherent and effective. At sea, on the sea and close to the sea, the raids of pirates and the accelerations of History continued to produce more metamorphosis than the demon of measure had exorcised, while the new forms between which they operated were not revealing themselves less unstable than the visions ousted by the cult of evidence. And it is against this instability, perhaps, to stem the performative power that never ceased to be released around wines of Madeira, oriental spices, Brazilian woods, Mediterranean wheat, Spanish wool, Dutch ceramics and precious stones, that in 1651 the English parliament resolved to enact the application of the *Navigation Act*. Thus, in a futile attempt to limit the "catastrophe of local ontologies" (Sloterdijk, 2013, p. 31), Shakespeare's marine metamorphosis (*sea-change*) risked abandoning the scene in search of *sea-power* (Mollat du Jourdin, 1993). From now on, more precisely, to arrange a deal in English ports it became necessary that a ship had been built in England and that the owner was no less English than the captain and three-quarters of his crew.

It is not surprising then that the sailors of the *New Atlantis*, starting from 1624, had already equipped themselves to disguise their presence among the crew of foreign merchant ships, masking their

identity under the name of other nations. And this not for money, the governor of the island specified, nor for any other material wealth, “but only for God’s first creature, which was Light: to have light (I say) of the growth of all parts of the world” (Bacon, 1999, p. 168). On the one hand, the dream of knowledge continues to reactivate the primordial function of water, which at the beginning of *Genesis* or in the palimpsest of the *alchemical opus* operate on the perpetual redefinition of forms, while on the other the constitution of modern states and the so-called original accumulation processes that inform their provisions – animated by the same *amor sceleratus habendi* which in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* had inflated the first sails of humanity – seem to develop a kind of Hydrophobia or Thalassophobia. More precisely, the sea is still demonized “as the sphere of the unreckonable and lawless, in which it is difficult to find one’s bearing” and “as a naturally given boundary of the realm of human activities” (Blumenberg, 1997, p. 8), but these timeless motivations are now declined in the new central role of the oceans as a variable to be considered and a border to be crossed in order “to mobilize wealth through trade or extraction often accompanied by the effort at religious conversion” (Maier, 2016, p. 32). Thus, a third internal link to “the metaphors of seafaring and shipwreck” as Hans Blumenberg defines it, comes to full maturity, that is, a link relating to the correspondence between the “two elements characterized by liquidity, water and money” (p. 9).

In 1628 Harvey’s studies on the circulatory system were made public and when the English parliament resolved to make the naval circulation of goods equally systematic, the same year in which the *Navigation Act* came into force, Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* appears in London bookstores, which would providentially provide an anatomical basis for the transfer of the scientific revolution into the fabric of political doctrine. However, the “artificial animal” which also lent itself to the figuration of new experiments had suddenly lost the aquatic nature that was reserved for it by the biblical source, because on the frontispiece of the book, instead of the seas that the monster of Job could have easily reduced to a jar of ointments, a terrestrial landscape now appeared. That this replacement was not to be attributed to chance could be confirmed by

simply reading the text, in the passage in which Hobbes delves into the description of the phenomena of collective madness, which is always the product of individual passions that threaten internally, in a subtle and viral way, the health of the state. Because,

as in the midst of the sea, though a man perceives no sound of that part of the water next him; yet he is well assured, that part contributes as much, to the roaring of the sea, as any other part, of the same quantity: so also, though we perceive no great unquietness, in one, or two men; yet we may be well assured, that their singular passions, are parts of the seditious roaring of a troubled nation (Hobbes, 1998, p. 50).

The sound of the sea, in this way, ensures a metaphorical support to the disorder that Hobbes could not in any way provide in a unitary form, since if the multitude were recognized a possibility of synthesis, if the Leviathan were not generated by agreements which bind individual citizens among themselves but the action of a collective subject previously defined and therefore underlying the negotiation, the sovereign would be involved in a relationship of reciprocity (the old domination contract) which would risk inhibiting his powers. In other words, the metaphor of the sea disturbs the same doctrinal structure that it was intended to exemplify, introducing a connotation, that of the overall noise, which prevents the state from considering itself as entirely absolute (Stolze, 2019). So, we witness a recursive movement comparable to the activity of a ghost: the sea that disappeared from the title page reappears a few pages later, in a less literal but equally active form, to haunt with its claims the consistency of the conceptual apparatus that banned it.

30

Canetti writes:

The Englishman's disasters have been experienced at sea; his dead he has often had to imagine lying at the bottom of the sea ; and thus the sea has offered him transformation and danger. His life at home is complementary to life at sea : security and monotony are its essential characteristics. Everyone has his place which, except to go to sea, he

is not supposed to leave for the sake of any transformation; everyone is as sure of his habits as of his possessions (Canetti, 1978, p. 172).

Perhaps the ghost of the sea would never cease to torment Thomas Hobbes, who in his old age would dedicate himself to the translation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, surely he must have disturbed the first scientists of life more than a little. Anticipating them by a very few years, Tommaso Campanella had produced a typology that was completely comparable to that of Claude Duret, advisor of Henry IV who at the beginning of the seventeenth century could still attribute the birth of ducks to a metamorphosis of the fruits.

Campanella writes:

And we see the frogs produce themselves in the dirty, viscous water, which falls into the summer dust and immediately changes its skin and subtle spirit; and I have often seen horses' mane come alive in the hot rain and turn into little snakes [...]. And I also saw the linen threads and cords, in the warm waters, become insects (Campanella, 2007, pp. 40-41).

31

Furthermore, Campanella does not limit himself to placing the principle of generation *ex putri materia* at the origin of snakes and insects, but extends it to the point of not excluding (*negare tamen non audeo*) that it may also apply to certain forms of human life (Carella, 2012). Yet his observations could be defined an echo of the time just gone, a sort of survival of reality that the new course is hastily archiving in a past of myth and belief. François Jacob wrote in the first lines of one of his fortunate articles:

Some of the 16th-century books devoted to zoology are illustrated by superb drawings of the various animals that populate the earth. Certain contain detailed descriptions of such creatures as dogs with fish heads, men with chicken legs, or even women without heads. The notion of monster that blend the characteristics of different species is not itself surprising: everyone has imagined or sketched such

hybrids. What is disconcerting today is that in the 16th century these creatures belonged, not to the world of fantasies, but to the real world. Many people had seen them and described them in detail. The monsters walked alongside the familiar animals or everyday life. They were within the limits of the possible (Jacob, 1977, p. 1161).

Thus, in 1636, when Campanella republished his observations in a Latin translation, confirming his full confidence in his own witnesses (*ranae, anguiculi, animalia insecta*) and the consequent reiteration of “un écart morphologique”, a misunderstanding of the species, a monstrous phenomenon because it is contrary to the growing need to see that “the same engender the same”, it really seems that “the moment has come when rational thought would triumph over monstrosity, just as the imagination had taken pleasure in believing that heroes and saints could triumph over monsters”. If in the teratology of the Renaissance the animal forms still play a game of “exchanging their organs and varying the combinations of these organs”, in fact, “in the age of experiments, the monster is taken to be a symptom of puerility or mental malady; it indicates debility or a breakdown of reason” (Canguilhem, 2008, pp. 134-140). Thus, in the third meditation Descartes will relegate all phenomena similar to those observed by Campanella to the sphere of *Factitious Ideas*, that is, images manufactured by reason that have no correspondence in the extended world.

32

In 1668 Francesco Redi ascertained that it was not the mysterious transformations of a decaying matter that generated the worms in the cavities of a carcass, but the flies that had laid their eggs there. The *identical generates the identical*, thus, definitively retiring the natural philosophy handed down by the fourth book of the *Georgics*, where the story is introduced by an apparition of Proteus that emerges from the waters (*e fluctibus antra ibat*) who then turns into every possible oddity (*omnia transformat sese in miracula rerum*). Yet Proteus will have to resign himself to informing Aristeo of the reasons that caused the slaughter of his bees: it is precisely by fleeing from Aristeo that Eurydice was killed by a serpent and it is therefore a retaliation of Orpheus and the nymphs that now the fate that now befalls the beekeeper. It will therefore be Cyrene

who will interpret Proteus's story to show Aristeo how to proceed: sacrificing four bulls and four heifers to the nymphs, abandoning their carcasses in the woods and then returning to verify what would happen nine days later. Aristeo follows his mother's instructions and at dawn on the ninth day, when he returns to the woods, he discovers that

Hic vero subitum ac dictu mirabile monstrum
 Aspiciunt, liquefacta bovom per viscera toto
 Stridere apes utero et ruptis effervere costis
 Immensasque trahi nubes iamque arbore summa
 Confluere et lentis uvam demittere ramis (IV, 555-558).

It is true that it is a prodigy (*monstrum*), but it is also the very way in which bees are born. The point is that once placed in an airtight container, Redi will say, carrion does not generate anything anymore. And it is in this same perspective, therefore, so that it is always the same to generate the same, that even the man of the seventeenth century is preformed, miniaturized and boxed in a vitelline membrane, inside which the development of the foetus must consist in the maturation of a form already given. The enchanted world of Tommaso Campanella and Claude Duret, then, turns upside down in Malebranche's philosophy, which marks the immutable order of *res extensa* with the seal of divine creation, so much so that "the females of the original animals may have been created along with all those of the same species that they have begotten and that are to be begotten in the future" (Malebranche, 1997, p. 27; Pyle, 2006). The century therefore does not hesitate to reveal how every man had already been enclosed in the bodies of Adam or Eve (*experimenta nostra patent cum quicquid est hominum in lumbis Adami et Evae occlusum fuerit*: Swammerdam, 1685, p. 54) or it more cautiously limits itself to suspecting (*l'on peut supposer*) that every animal observed under the microscope may contain an animal of the same seed (Hartsoeker, 1674, pp. 221-244). Metamorphosis is nothing but a veneer (*se transforment à nôtre veuë*) because as soon as their size allows it, for example, insects free themselves from the membrane that made them look like worms and appear for what they have always been. The one preformed into the other,

thus, the *petit animal* that scientists presume or expect to meet during their inspections look more and more like the *homunculi that the impious and parabalani Paracelsus hoped to spot in the flasks of the alchemists* (Redi, 1996, p. 90), but their shape will have been protected from any hypothesis of irrigation, from the wonders of steam and from the mother of all navigations, that in the amniotic fluid.

In the meantime, the idea of metamorphosis had become so absurd and incredible as to be improper even in theatre. So much so that in order to save Iphigenia it will be necessary to invent an alternative solution to the one that perhaps could have enthused Euripides' audience (*une métamorphose qui pouvait bien trouver quelque créance du temps d'Euripide*), but one which would have now caused annoyance and dissatisfaction (Racine, J., 2009, p. 1083). Racine's theorem would seem to be confirmed by the precedent of Jean Rotrou, who in 1640 had thought of replacing Euripides' alleged metamorphosis with an apotheosis, but as his Agamemnon emphasised (*ô rare aventure, ô miracle inouy*) this new solution did not differ so much from the expedients which Racine will accuse of obsolescence (Rotrou, 1641, V, 3). But it will be opportune to remember that in Euripides' tragedy no metamorphosis actually took place, since Iphigenia was explicitly replaced by – and not changed into – a doe. Therefore, philology is on the side of painters, who from the time of Timante to Giambattista Tiepolo, passing through Jan Steen (1671) and from the fresco painted in Versailles by Charles de La Fosse (1680) have never stopped depicting the doe on the same scene where the sacrifice is about to be made, that is, in lieu of Iphigenia. Yet, when Racine's youngest son proposes to compare Euripides' tragedy with the work of his father, whose reasons he is determined to support (*on ne pouvait sur notre théâtre sauver Iphigénie par la voie d'un miracle si peu vraisemblable pour nous*), he attributes the miraculous ending of Rotrou to the Greek text, also erasing any trace of blood from the classical palimpsest (Racine, L., 1843, pp. XXVIII-XIX). Because it seems that blood is the real stake: the animal blood of the ancients, the blood providentially spared by Rotrou and the impure blood of the solution finally adopted by Racine. Who, as is well known,

uses an extraordinary case of homonymy: Erifile is Elena's secret daughter, in reality her name is the same as her cousin, Ifigenia, and her evil nature makes her a much more adequate victim to the *vraisemblance*. The representation must appear plausible, but this likelihood – as underlined by the controversy aroused in France by the success of *Cid*, when Corneille found himself having to defend a tragicomedy substantially guilty of having ennobled the enemy Spanish, but otherwise accused of formal inconsistency – finds its profound and less negotiable motivations in a viscerally political dimension. Therefore, even in Racine's drama Iphigenia is constantly surrounded by an element quite comparable to the multitude of Hobbes, the crowd that demands her blood moves in waves (*flots tumultueux*: V, 2) and a flood of enemies is ready to swallow her (*les flots d'ennemis prêts à l'envelopper*: V, 3). However, when her namesake will replace her on the altar of war, the one who wished to see Iphigenia dead and who will personally procure her own death, it will no longer be the killing of an innocent virgin to restore order and stability to things, but the sudden shift of sacrifice into the paradigm of just punishment. For this kind of expedients, referring to some rites such as the Athenian Bufonias where the participants absolved themselves of the responsibility of the killing by attributing the blame to a single individual and pursued the objective of obtaining the consent of the victim, classical philologists have appealed to the genre of *Unschuldskomödie*, the comedy of innocence. An innocence clearly granted to Racine's community, who by sacrificing a woman who is nevertheless guilty (*qui mérite en quelque façon d'être punie*) tends to distance itself from the bloody crowd that only later, when the body was already lying on the ground, realized that they had not killed a virgin but a doe. Three years later, Racine will entrust the ending of *Phaedra* to the word *pureté* and it is precisely the search for this purity, it seems, that allows the *sleeping sea* to resume bellowing (*la mer leur répond par ses mugissements*), which while continuing to render miraculous the departure of the Greek fleet (*quel miracle*, Clytemnestra exclaims) made it unthinkable to have resorted in 1674 to such a timely replacement that could be confused with the miracle of metamorphosis. Just as the numerous performances of *Iphigenia*, are staged in the city, Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz is staying at

the Hotel des Romains in Faubourg St. Germain. He had arrived in Paris two years earlier to persuade Louis XIV to wage a Holy War against Egypt and he regularly frequented its theatres (Stewart 2005). And it is precisely in a theatre, that he may have heard for the first time the same marine bellow to which many years later he will associate one of the most famous examples of the passage to the consciousness of the still unreflected forms of perception. Then, to catch the sound of the sea,

we must hear the parts which make up this whole [*ce mugissement même*], that is the noise of each wave, although each of these little noises makes itself known only when combined confusedly with all the others, and would not be noticed if the wave which made it were by itself. We must be affected slightly by the motion of this wave, and have some perception of each of these noises, however faint they may be; otherwise there would be no perception of a hundred thousand waves, since a hundred thousand nothings cannot make something (Leibniz, 1982, p. 47).

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As is well known, Leibniz's man perceives many more things than he believes he perceives and what "sensible experience places before our eyes", therefore, the experimental and sensitive datum that ministers of method must concern themselves with, arises from a background of changes (*des changements dans l'âme même*) which do not always translate into the acquisition of evidence. Nevertheless, if it were possible to unfold the interiority of the monad, we would find the entire universe there, since there being no leaps in nature, "the communication between things is able to extend to any distance" of time and space, so that "God can read in the individual body what happens everywhere, what has already happened and what will happen" (Leibniz, 2001, p. 87). The intellect must therefore delve into the knowledge of the relationship that unites causes to effects, but "if we meant literally that things of which we are unaware exist neither in the soul nor in the body, then we would fail in philosophy as in politics, because we would be neglecting to mikron, imperceptible changes [*les progrès insensibles*]" (Leibniz, 1982, p. 49). This progress, appropriately

exemplified by the noise of the single waves, creates a sudden analogy between the sea of Leibniz and that, undoubtedly darker and regressive but still mobile, of Thomas Hobbes. The aforementioned analogy seems to be confirmed by the words that Gilles Deleuze will use to paraphrase the paragraph in which Leibniz wrote: "To give a clearer idea of these minute perceptions which we are unable to pick out from the crowd, I like to use the example of the roaring noise [*du mugissement*] of the sea which impresses itself on us when we are standing on the shore" (Leibniz, 1982, p. 46). With the expression "from the crowd", the Italian translator Emilio Cecchi renders it in French as *dans la foule*, to which publishers often add the specification *des perceptions*. On the contrary, for Deleuze it will be a question of "apprehend the sound of the sea, or of an assembly of people, but not the murmur of each wave or person who nonetheless is part of each whole" (Deleuze, 1993, p. 87). In other occurrences of this example, which Leibniz confessed to habitually resorting (*j'ai coutume de me servir de l'exemple du mugissement ou du bruit de la mer*), for the assembly of people of Deleuze not even the slightest margin of eventuality produced by the passage in question is created, but the association between the subliminal wave of progress and the no less subliminal wave of regression to the state of nature still appears possible. In any case, what Leibniz wants to establish is the way in which the wholeness of the world has always been preformed within the monad and thus, in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, whoever approaches the shore (*ceux qui s'approchent du rivage de la mer*) experiences the confused perception of a totality otherwise enclosed in the folds of the soul (Leibniz, 2020, p. 40), which emerges to consciousness through the progressive deepening of an interior experience. Because the soul, we read about this in the *Principles of Nature and Grace*, knows the infinite but in a confused manner, "as when walking along the seashore and hearing the great noise it makes, we indeed hear the particular noises made by each wave of which the whole noise is composed, but without distinguishing them" (Leibniz, 2001, p. 51). To every effort of distinction, then, corresponds a further corollary of contingencies as of yet unknown and it is therefore necessary that the final reason for these shifts remain foreign to their infinite concatenation: it will therefore be by divine regulation that the

content of the soul can correspond to the content of the world, as *if it truly passed from one to the other*, where the origin of each form (*origo formarum*) is relative to the knowledge of what the monad already contained. Therefore, in this sense, having reduced any transformation to the unfolding of a preordained interiority (Becchi, 2017), when Leibniz argues that the soul is immortal and that it can only pass through continuous metamorphosis, the strange forms that at the end of the *Tempest* would have survived the magic (*strange Shapes*: III, 3, 15-20) are taken over by a reason that conjugates them to the anterior future, because the soul too, can only unfold in the forms predetermined by the purpose that the creator will have infused into it (*divinae praeformationi debetur*: Leibniz, 2016).

Meanwhile, the seas that roared in the *Tempest* (*to cry to th' sea that roar'd to us*: I, 2, 149), the animal bladder of Duret and the seas that continue to bellow still in Leibniz's *New essays on Human Understanding* or in Racine's *Iphigenia*, find a passionate defender in the Principal Painter in Ordinary. In fact, with his theory on expression, which relies on the natural similarity between the elements of creation, Charles Le Brun does not limit himself to postulating a correspondence between the face of a human and that of animals, the same correspondence that in 1773 will be further confirmed by the French translation of the alleged Rubens' Roman sketch-books by the bookseller Jombert (*l'homme composé des éléments de l'univers, participe de tous les animaux*: Rubens, 1773, p. 11), but Le Brun extends the application of universal sympathies to the correct representation of landscapes (*elle doit encore être dans la représentation des paysages*: Le Brun, 1698, p. 3). He himself must have known very well the two globes that Louis XIV had commissioned at the beginning of the 1680s to the Venetian friar Vincenzo Coronelli and which at first should have been placed in the Galerie des Glaces, and would then be installed at the castle of Marly, two locations both under Le Brun's supervision, who, in addition, had designed them. And it is thus interesting to note how Coronelli himself, in his globes, did not fail to associate an extraordinary apparatus of zoomorphic figures and descriptive notes to the precise arrangement of the lands and seas, recreating a strong interaction

between the forms of nature and the forms in which the peculiarities of human beings were expressed. The textual parts would have intensified at the poles, of course, where the narrative had to compensate for the lack of sufficiently reliable maps, but the whole earth's surface was episodically populated by sea monsters, storks and cetaceans. To evaluate the meaning of these representations one should look to the interpretation of another globe, preserved in Venice, which Coronelli builds upon his return from Paris. Here, in the south of Madagascar, right in the middle of the Indian Ocean, where the most recent testimonies of the Jesuit fathers do not agree with the maps in his possession, the friar specifies that "such observations, as they would upset the whole geography if put into practice, deserve further consideration first" (*Catalogo dei globi*, 1960, p. 28). Oceans and coasts, in other words, can provisionally take the form of all the animals necessary for the completion of their *sensible experience*.

The still partial conclusions of this account could be entrusted to a photograph from 1910 which portrays Debussy in the company of Stravinsky. Behind them, in Debussy's studio, is framed a copy of the *Great Wave off Kanagawa* which five years earlier, partially altered, had appeared on the covers of the first printed edition of *La Mer*. The sea that had repeatedly roared and bellowed in the first centuries of the so-called Anthropocene, therefore, the sea that at the end of Poe's *Manuscript found in a bottle* is even afforded four mouths, now it unsheathes countless claws. He does or continues to do so within the field of figuration and metaphor, of course, obeying a more comprehensive reorganization of knowledge and assigning to what Galileo had defined *pure narration* the task to preserve a weakened image of myth and magic. The proliferation of metamorphoses in Baroque art, in this perspective, would actually seem to coincide with their disablement, precisely because they are reduced exclusively to figures, that is to a leap that is no longer determined in the reality of *daily life*, as it had happened in the 16th century as described by François Jacob, but only in fantasy (Kibédi Varga, 1980, pp. 4-6). If the *Don Quixote* can be considered the first modern literary work, Foucault argues, it is precisely because

in it we see the cruel reason of identities and differences make endless sport of signs and similitudes; because in it language breaks off its old kinship with things and enters into that lonely sovereignty from which it will reappear, in its separated state, only as literature; because it marks the point where resemblance enters an age which is, from the point of view of resemblance, one of madness and imagination (Foucault, 2002, p. 54).

Yet, as it happens in the sea of Hobbes, the metaphor and the similarity seem to undermine the coherence of the order of the discourse itself, which has confined them to *pure narration*, taking revenge similar to that of *homunculi* who once escaped from the *alchemists' flasks* in which Francesco Redi presumed to have caged them, reappear at the end of microscopes. In the meantime, Racine's exorcisms against a phantasmic metamorphosis will give this same movement of disappearance and reappearance the crystalline form of the return of the repressed. Finally, with Leibniz, the continuous metamorphosis of the monad will be ensured for the protection of a final reason that has always preformed them. The persistence of metamorphosis, in other words, this partial failure of reason in the anthropological effort to separate the *human being* from the *rest of nature*, ends up corroborating Walter Benjamin's thesis according to which the Baroque would have been no less devoted to magic than the Renaissance, because "[w]hatever it picks up, its Midas-touch turns into something endowed with significance. Its element was transformation of every sort; and allegory was its scheme" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 229). Before an epistemological dignity is returned to zoomorphism, however, it will be necessary to wait for the time of Johann Kaspar Lavater, with whom the *human being* actually reverts to brazenly compromising itself with the *rest of nature* but in a chapter of *Physiognomy* entirely written by Goethe.

To conclude, then, Goethe deserves a last digression, a brief reference to the story of the gentleman from Antwerp who, on his return from a long journey, rushed into the workshop of a painter friend to tell him what he had seen in a particular village in the Ardennes. The painter had not even deigned to greet him, it is said, as if

nothing could distract him from the painting he was undertaking, but when the gentleman had approached the easel he had discovered that the landscape reproduced with such concentration by his friend was precisely the one evoked in his story. After all, Gombrich writes, the gentleman was an old friend of the painter, he used to regularly visit his house and upon returning from his trip he had gone to him with the sole purpose of telling him about the picturesque images he had seen. So it was perhaps the familiarity he had with the painter's work, we may add, to tune his spirit with what he had seen during the trip (Gombrich, 1966, p. 116). When she writes about the same anecdote, on the contrary, Svetlana Alpers seems animated by the need to rehabilitate not so much or not only the primacy of perception, but the idea of a spiritual harmony between the gentleman and the painter that recognizes a descriptive purity of perception. In doing this, however, she does not hesitate to rearticulate the plot and to attribute to the individual characters a more rational behaviour. Now the gentleman who had seen the Ardennes will invite his painter friend to visit him and it is only after listening to the beginning of his story that the artist will get to work (Alpers, 1983, p. 147). In reality, Alpers' version is a manipulation, because in the original text things go exactly as Gombrich claims (*a Gentleman comes to visit his old friend, an ingenious Painter of that Citie*: Norgate, 1997, p. 83) but that does not mean that her intervention is not worthwhile. On the one hand it has the advantage of attenuating the postmodern propensity to debase any form of experience in writing that precedes it and determines it, on the other it risks associating the perceptual sphere with the exercise of an intention that is exaggeratedly present to itself. In this sense, when she says that some views of the seventeenth century adhere to a desire to inform that does not necessarily imply the latency of a formal model, her hypothesis is certainly appropriate for the purpose of differentiating the individual poetic and pictorial traditions, but it remains less plausible in terms of aesthetic reflection. Indeed, precisely because a Dutch merchant wishes to see a depiction of himself and of his house (Alpers, 1983, p. 151), it is necessary that "the look of a good life" be consumed in the forms pre-arranged by a representation, albeit *cartographic*, but which will not fail to influence the figurative organization of the same reality designated

to show itself. In other words, not only does the cartography of comfort obey a specific narrative purpose, because the elements of figuration will still have to illustrate how things are, but it will have exercised a preliminary influence on everyday life.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to derive from Alpers' alterations an argument in favour of Gombrich's conclusions, which are badly supported by the proverbial "case of Aretino who discovers the beauty of Venetian sunsets through Titian's colour" (Gombrich, 1966, p. 117). That anecdote, refers to a letter of 1544 in which Aretino spoke clearly of a sky that "never was embellished with such hazy paint", of buildings that "seemed made of artificial matter" and of the air separated from the palaces "with the way that Vecellio sets it apart", but the merits of this enterprise were explicitly attributed to "Nature, master of the masters" and the ending of the letter, consequently, expressed the nostalgia for a landscape that only Titian could have fixed on the canvas (Aretino, 2008, pp. 15-16). On closer inspection, painting had certainly revealed itself to be a prefiguration of reality, but of a reality that did not render knowledge pleonastic and which, if anything, intensified it, representing one of those "conditions under which phenomena appear" that would later constitute, according to Goethe, the specific and qualifying object of morphology. Which, as is well known, has a peculiar relationship with the central pages of *Italian Journey*, which end with an appeal to Herder's judgement that even the gentleman of Antwerp could have addressed to his painter friend ("And when I get home, you shall judge for yourselves how well I have used my eyes": Goethe, 1982, p. 304)

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A few hours earlier, on May 16, 1787, Goethe was on the ship that brought him back from Sicily to the Gulf of Naples in the company of the landscape painter Christoph Heinrich Kniep and he wrote:

Everybody was glum and impatient, except Kniep and myself. Looking at the world with the eyes of painters [*mit malerischen Augen*], we were perfectly content to enjoy the sunset, which was the most magnificent spectacle we had seen during the whole voyage. Cape Minerva and its adjoining ranges lay before us in a display of brilliant colours. The

cliffs stretching to the south had already taken on a bluish tint. From the Cape to Sorrento the whole coast was lit up. Above Vesuvius towered an enormous smoke cloud, from which a long streak trailed away to the east, suggesting that a violent eruption was in progress. Capri rose abruptly on our left and, through the haze, we could see the outlines of its precipices. The wind had dropped completely, and the glittering sea, showing scarcely a ripple, lay before us like a limpid pond under the cloudless sky (p. 299).

And it was precisely on that journey to Sicily, taking on a landscape painter's gaze (*als Landschaftszeichner*), that Goethe had declared that he had finally been able to understand the vaporous transparency (*die dunstige Klarheit*) of Claude Lorrain's paintings, establishing a circular, and no longer causal, relationship between the mastery of Nature and the mastery of painting that now allowed him to extend his understanding of Lorrain's work beyond those same vapours (*durch den durchsichtigen Dunst*) to guess at the profile of a cliff. Thus, the "all-encircling sea with its ever-changing colours and moods" (p. 305), that is to say in the only situation in which a man can really "have a true conception of the world and of his own relation to it" (p. 220), the "feeling of a secret intimacy between the expectation of the eye and the extension contemplated by it" was created (Besse, 2008, p. 56), which also restores an animal interiority to the landscape.

But this correspondence – by virtue of which "man knows himself only to the extent that he knows the world, of which he is aware only in himself, as he is aware of himself only in it" – implies adherence to a form of chameleon-like knowledge based on the assumption that "every new object, if observed well, opens up a new organ in us" (Goethe, 1983a, p. 146). Each experiment, therefore, must place the eye in front of itself and its own metamorphoses, because "pretending to adhere to the individuality of the phenomenon and observe it, measure it, weigh it is like pretending to drink the sea" (Goethe, 1983b, p. 135). And it is precisely in this pre scientific and Renaissance sea, where one could actually "study the motions and the forms of the waves (Goethe, 1982, p. 187), that Goethe's

aesthetic experience proposes to overcome the limit inscribed in the marine drafted by Hobbes and Leibniz.

This possibility is revealed by the gaze that transcends the iron contrast between “sensible experience” and “pure narration”, in a morphological perspective to which Goethe will not fail to ensure the comfort of his first encounter with Kantian aesthetics. To be exact, it is 1817 when he writes:

I came upon the *Critique of the power of judgment* and I am indebted to it for a truly happy period of my existence. In it I saw exposed side by side the most diverse subjects of my labours, products of Art and Nature addressed one the same as the other, aesthetic judgement and teleological judgement highlighting each other. Although it was not always possible for me to match my way of seeing with that of the author and, here and there, something seemed to escape me, the great master ideas of that work were perfectly analogous to what I had created, done and thought up until then; the internal life of both Art and Nature, their mutual action and reaction, were clearly discussed in that book. The products of these two unlimited worlds had to exist for themselves, and what coexisted existed indeed for the other, but not expressly because of the other (Goethe, 1983c, p. 138).

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The definition of teleological judgement, in fact, could provide him with a conception of changes extraneous to any objective determination, which was undoubtedly susceptible to perspective coherence but only “in analogy with causality according to ends” (Kant, §61, 2000, p. 234). One can study the structure of a bird in two ways, Kant had suggested: it can be considered in relation to a *nexus finalis*, or it can be established that nature “could have formed itself in a thousand different ways” and that its conformity to a purpose therefore restores the changing reconfigurations of a *nexus effectivus*. Even the morphological characteristics of birds (the lightness of the bones, the arrangement of the wings and the similarity of the tail to a rudder) are not seemingly caused by the purpose of flight, but imply the need to fly “as if it were to be found in nature” (*als ob*

er in der Natur befindlich wäre). If in eye of Preformationism the art of representing objects arranged on a single plane at a different distance essentially consisted of a deception (*consiste principalement à tromper la Vûë*: Hartsoeker, 1712, p. 42), now it is only the insertion of Nature in an analogical perspective (*als ob, as if*) to allow it to be observed correctly. The artist, who did not fail to profess his implacable aversion to final causes (Goethe, 1983c, p. 138), will therefore be able to claim the cognitive value of his own experience of the world.

Yet, despite Kant's aesthetics being able to represent for Goethe the entire philosophical corpus that needs a spirit that "had no desire to lay bare the secret of life" (Cassirer, 1963, p. 77), it should be noted that it is precisely the third *Critique* that promotes a representation of the sea simply opposite to that of *Italian Journey*. The *human being* who only on the high seas could "have a true conception of the world and of his own relation to it" in fact, in the *Critique of the power of judgment* looks at "the wide ocean, enraged by storms" from a shore partially adjacent to that of Leibniz and derives from it its feeling of alienation from the *rest of nature* (Kant, §23, 2000, p. 129). Thus, the Ardennes observed from an artist's shop in Antwerp, not before Aretino had contemplated Venice's lagoon from a window in Ca' Bollani, will be echoed by the many shipwrecks *quand on est au rivage* that allow the Romantic genius to experience the nostalgia of the infinite. Therefore the sea can be imagined from the top of a hill, but giving life to a series of suggestions that will essentially lack two things, "variety and belonging and being close to our daily life" (Leopardi, 1991, I, p. 1051). Or it will be the sea observed from the cliffs of Rügen, where it is said that David Caspar Friedrich used to climb on stormy days and exclaim: "How big, mighty, wonderful all this!". But there will always be something in this sublime spectacle that nullifies the potential expressed by the encounter between morphology and teleological judgement and their intolerance for the dominance of functions over mutations in form.

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Form and Matter

In an attempt to describe the break that would have characterized the passage to the seventeenth century, I have previously employed a phrase by Bruno Latour on which it is now appropriate to linger. In the perspective we have outlined, it would seem that the *hybrids* that according to François Jacob populated the earth in the sixteenth century, would be the ones to claim their rights through Latour's reflection. Yet, it could be Latour himself to provide an interpretation of the notion of *form* that risks compromising the same enterprise it intends to complete. A commendable enterprise, which on the page with which I would like to begin, was formulated in these terms:

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In order to portray the first new Earth as one falling body among all the other falling bodies of the universe, Galileo had to put aside all notions of climate, agitation, and metamorphosis (apart from tides); to discover the second new Earth, climatologists are bringing the climate back in and returning the Earth to its sublunar, corrupted, and agitated condition. [...] Even though we have to continue fighting those who are in denial, I propose that we let them alone for a moment and seize this opportunity to advance our common cosmopolitics. What I want to explore in this paper is what sort of agency this new Earth should be granted (Latour, 2014, pp. 3-4).

This enterprise is consistent with the programme that Latour had already explained in the opening lines of his famous conversation with François Ewald, when he did not hesitate to declare that the concept of *symmetrical anthropology* remained to all intents and purposes a project of political philosophy (Latour, 2008, p. 12). After all, the idea of employing for scientific experimentation the same attitude with which ethnography had approached the truths of others, had struck him at the time of his appointment at the Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique Outre-Mer of Abidjan, in the Ivory Coast, that is to say in an environment which, albeit in a broad sense, can be defined as post-colonial (Schmidgen, 2015, pp. 20-24). Around the world, Latour explained, the West would have been regularly surprised by the stubbornness with which other populations continued to confuse facts and moral values, in a “hallucinatory mixture of conceptions of the cosmos and conceptions of social life” indifferent to the suspicion that the same hallucination had always influenced his relationship with nature and with science. Better yet, that relationship was more properly arming him, because it arose from the fact-value of considering oneself as custodians of an appropriate separation between scientific truth and the necessary conditions for its historical and subjective existence, the supposed universalism for which “modern men were never bad: they did indeed go to war, but always for a pedagogical purpose, since they limited themselves to teaching each other the evidence of a shared world, which was that of nature and technology” (Latour, 2008, p. 15).

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Already in the concluding lines of *We have never been modern*, to the work of abstraction or “purification” of the supposed facts that have altered the vision and demonized the initiatives, the modern and positivist “we” to which Latour often tends to attribute a questionable coherence, must contrast a theoretical posture that is finally on par with the political contingency: “If we do not change the common dwelling – he writes – we shall not absorb in it the other cultures that we can no longer dominate, and we shall be forever incapable of accommodating in it the environment that we can no longer control” (Latour, 1993, p. 145). The problem, wrote Razmig Keucheyan, is that despite the appeals and “although it is exhibited in

works that have titles like *Politiques de la nature* or *Les atmosphères de la politique*, or in journals such as *Cosmopolitiques*, Latour's remains "a theory that is ultimately barely political", because "the 'pragmatic' epistemology from which most of these works derive is not able to capture the systemic and conflictual nature of environmental inequalities" (Keucheyan, 2014, p. 48). Therefore, to the list of what Keucheyan must obviously regard as misleading titles, we must also add *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, a book that in the perspective I am trying to outline has, however, the merit of positioning itself in a more explicit manner in the field of post-colonial reflection, to which Latour declares he wants to attribute an "unexpected" meaning (Latour, 2018, p. 7). In line with the conclusions of *We have never been modern*, where the problem was that of a subject finally unable to confirm its dominion over "other cultures" and the environment, now it is as though Europe "had made a centennial pact with the potential migrants: we went to your lands without asking your permission; you will come to ours without asking". Or rather, a dual pact with the great-grandchildren of the colonized and "other terrestrials, who are also setting out to invade its borders: the water of the seas, dried-up or overflowing rivers, forests obliged to migrate as fast as possible so as not to be overtaken by climate change, microbes and parasites, all these, too, aspire to a great replacement" (p. 91).

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More than a *barely political theory*, after the emergence to the surface of the text of phenomena such as the invasion or the representation of cultures as coherent, homogeneous subjectivities, linked only by a relationship of juxtaposition or of reciprocal *substitution* (modern and terrestrial, European and migrant, the "we" to which I have already referred and its substantial indifference to the "systemic and conflictual character of inequalities"), Latour's politics could be defined as *not very reflective*, because they tend to reify in his proposal the same separation between facts and values that he had denounced in an analytic context, postulating the existence of cultures newly "purified" of their multiple and explosive social hybridizations. Moreover, in this way, the effectively colonial paradigm of juxtaposition and substitution – which does not lack porosity and grey areas, for example in Frantz Fanon's reflection

– is extended to the limits of the present, where the post-colonial condition encounters the truly “unexpected” obligation of having to match a robotic consequence, an automatic reflex, a compulsion to repeat the outcomes of colonization. Thus, precisely in terms of *Down to Earth*, one could direct the same objection that he makes to the “grandiose Galilean invention”, to Latour, namely that not only the earth, but also the social forms once observed by Sirius remain “only a tiny part [...] of what we have the right to know positively” (p. 64). According to Latour, in fact, a more specific observation of this dimension would entail the restoration of a “pure form”, the social, which, also through the mediations of dialectic thought, would entail the denial of hybrids or their illusory, “modern” identification with a mixture of equally pure forms (Latour, 1993, p. 78). And here is how modernity ends up carrying out a function similar to that which in the perspective of the Anthropocene is conferred on the species (Manghi, 2018), a geological agent so undifferentiated as to cause the dual movement with which “climate change is denaturalised in one moment, relocated from the sphere of natural causes to that of human activities, only to be renaturalised in the next, when derived from an innate human trait, such as the ability to control fire” (Malm, Hornborg, 2014, p. 4). A control over fire that can easily represent, in metaphor, the use of coal in the furnaces of the industrial revolution or the first test of the plutonium bomb, the two events that in the official narrative compete to mark the start of the new era. In any case, Malm and Hornborg argue, the whole process would confirm the capitalist tendency of social relations to appear as natural properties of things (p. 6), proving the validity of the analyses conducted by Marx in the pages on *The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret*, the very same which Latour uses to elaborate his definition of *faitiche*. Latour then writes:

Under the now-dispelled fantasy of the fetish, the enlightened human being realizes that he is not really alone, but that he shares his existence with a crowd of actors. The alien he thought he was eliminating comes back in the frightfully complicated form of social multitude. The human actor has merely exchanged one form of transcendence for

another. [...] Marx, in his famous definition of the fetishism of commodities, illustrates how something that does nothing can still manage to proliferate (Latour, 2010, p. 10).

Thus, what the analysis of fetishism would involuntarily make blatant, is how much Marx himself considered it a mistake to transfer the origin of actions from the subject to the object, as if there really could be “a deanimated world of mere stuff” (Latour, 2014, p. 7) and preliminary to the incorporation of the value. That of fetishism, therefore, would turn out to be a mask with which commodities and capital cheat reason, which in this sense would grant them an initiative of which reason itself, actually, holds the monopoly. Marx, as seen by Latour, would thus participate in the Protestant war against the worship of icons, because the Reformation would remain the model of all the efforts made by modernity in order to purify humans of their hybridizations with the fetishistic activity of things (White, 2013, p. 673). Except that fetishism is in no way a belief or a deception, for Marx, but rather the real form that the relations between individuals and things take in the historical movement of capitalism. Thus, it is precisely on the definition and function of form in Marx’s reflection (but “as form”, underlines Hylton White) that, according to commentators, Latour’s critique would stumble. Marx himself had actually pointed this out very clearly:

Whence, then, arises the enigmatic character of the product of labour, as soon as it assumes the form of a commodity? Clearly, it arises from this form itself. The equality of the kinds of human labour takes on a physical form in the equal objectivity of the products of labour as values; the measure of the expenditure of human labour-power by its duration takes on the form of the magnitude of the value of the products of labour; and finally the relationships between the producers, within which the social characteristics of their labours are manifested, take on the form of a social relation between the products of labour (Marx, 1990, I, p. 164).

Marx makes no reference to a presumed distortion of contents or to their concealment (Vandenberghe, 2006, p. 168), but rather argues that he wants to analyse the manner in which these contents

correspond to the abstract form of social relations between commodities. This is not a deception, since “it is not people who originate these abstractions but their actions” (Sohn-Rethel, 1978, p. 20). However, if the fetishistic character is inherent in the form in which social determinations actually interact with or enact each other (*betätigt werden*, are put into action, activated), we would not seem to be grappling with the appearance or the phenomenal translation of a *thing in itself*, but rather with the Aristotelian form defined as the passage from potentiality to actuality. Along these lines, building on a note from the second chapter of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, a paragraph to which not even White and Vandenberghe pay attention, perhaps abandoning the idea of making it quite clear what is the distance that separates the fetishistic character of the commodity from the caricature that Latour is actually making of it. Marx writes: “The two peculiarities of the equivalent form we have just developed will become still clearer if we go back to the great investigator who was the first to analyse the value-form, like so many other forms of thought, society and nature. I mean Aristotle” (Marx, 1990, p. 151). Obviously, this is a path that would require a much more detailed and meticulous work of analysis, of which I will limit myself to sketching out the prerequisites, but which, even if incomplete, allows us to confirm Marx’s radical extraneousness to the terms within which Latour interprets his *modernity*.

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According to Latour, the canonical formulation of this modernity would be given by Kant, the architect of the “total separation” between the two “pure forms” of the subject and of the thing in itself, which by remaining unattainable then allows the same subject to claim the origin of the action in relation to the derived forms of the phenomenal world (Latour, 1993, pp. 56-58). But “Kant’s Copernican revolution – he adds – is only one in a long line of examples. Yet we have nothing that recounts the other aspect of the story: how objects construct the subject” (p. 82). It will therefore be worth pointing out that something exists, on the contrary, because Marx himself had written:

The object of art – like every other product – creates a public which is sensitive to art and enjoys beauty. Production thus

not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object. Thus production produces consumption (1) by creating the material for it; (2) by determining the manner of consumption; and (3) by creating the products, initially posited by it as objects, in the form of a need felt by the consumer. It thus produces the object of consumption, the manner of consumption and the motive of consumption. Consumption likewise produces the producer's inclination by beckoning to him as an aim-determining need (Marx, 1973, p. 92).

And this is because "a railway on which no train run, hence which is not used up, not consumed, is a railway *δυνάμει* [potentially] and not in reality" (p. 91). The opinion of Sidney Hook, according to which the starting point necessary to understand Marx remains Aristotle's metaphysics, would therefore be confirmed (Hook, 1950, p. 36). Even the railway is a matter of tracks, cars, locomotives, train drivers, other individuals and platforms that only through the concrete consumption of that same matter in the form of a railway (the action) becomes real, that is when "the object is not an object in general, but a specific object which must be consumed in a specific manner, to be mediated in its turn by production itself". Marx's adherence to the core of Aristotelian metaphysics, which in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* had already pushed him to proclaim the abandonment of abstraction (Jaulin, 2016, p. 116), is then immediately contrasted with the wrong conclusions that "a Hegelian", could have drawn on the relationship between production and consumption, thus lending credence to the thesis according to which nineteenth-century reflection seeks, in reference to Aristotle, a "counter-model to leave German idealism behind" (Thouard, 2004, p. 10). But, above all, this adherence allows us to clarify how the definition of the *form as a form*, can provide a point of support to grasp the limit of a not very reflective policy, as well as denying the way in which Latour interprets Marx in *On the modern cult of the factish gods*.

According to Aristotle, Paul Ricoeur wrote, the reduction of substance to form is inspired by the search for "what *determines reality*, what gives it a stable and identifiable status. [...] His

anti-Platonism, which leads him once again to submerge forms in things, to the point of identifying them physically and logically with things, does not push him to pursue reality even in its most individual existence” (Ricoeur, 2011, p. 241). Because such a reality remains the combination of form and matter, but a matter that “is no longer identified with an inert, indeterminate, unknowable substrate, but that represents the least determined in relation to the most determined in a production process” (p. 223). Matter, in other words, is “the system of means and obstacles by virtue of which a form opens its way to existence”, a road that is maintained between “the possible and the real”, therefore, forcing Aristotle to “develop the difficult notion of an *actuality of what is in potency*, in short the idea of an *imperfect act*” (p. 227). Therefore, that of “naked potency” or “pure matter” is only an abstract limit, “since the possibility of everything is never encountered, but only its determined inclination”. And change, consequently, always refers to a faculty of matter, to being “capable of”, to the aspirations of a form which, “by defining itself, defines the matter that suits it”. Matter, therefore, is not “an unknown thing in itself”, concludes Ricoeur, quoting Georges Rodier, but only “the indeterminate in relation to a more determined”, which means that “what is matter relatively to a more determined thing, is form relatively to a simpler thing” and “what is form in relation to its simpler elements, is the matter of a more complex thing”. And in this sense production is a transmission of form, so “in production the form is not generated, but pre-existing” (p. 235).

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Ricoeur’s conclusions allow us to underline how the *form as form*, according to Aristotle and Marx, is never placed in relation to an ontological purity (the naked matter or the pure form of the subject that claims the action erroneously attributed to commodities) but contrasts universalism with the importance of a determined and dynamic impurity, which exposes reality to the effects of contingency and history (Meikle, 1985, p. 165), that is, to change. Which by referring to potency as a faculty of matter, creates a tension between the not merely social determinations of pre-existing forms and the composite substance of the present. If in the third to last chapter of *Down to Earth* we come across the proposal to

move from “an analysis in terms of *production systems* to an analysis in terms of *generative systems*”, it is precisely because Latour conceives the relationship between history and forms in a different way. In the twelfth book of *Metaphysics* Aristotle wrote: “After these things <say> that neither the matter nor the form comes to be – I mean the last ones. For in every case of change, something changes, is changed by something, and changes into something: by what: the first mover; what: the matter; into what: the form” (Aristotle, 2019, Λ, 3, p. 24). The same fetishistic character of commodities, therefore, could describe the tendency of less determined forms (which in any case are already “something”) to change into the abstract form of the social relationship between the commodities themselves. By identifying it instead with the mystification of a purified and transcendent form, that is the “social”, Latour is not only inaccurate, but ignores the Aristotelian dimension of the *imperfect act* within the “system of means and obstacles by virtue of which a form opens its way towards existence”, this seems to hope for a total overlapping between form and matter with messianic characteristics, an event that elsewhere he calls *materiality* and which he understands as what is produced “by letting time flow from the future to the present”. Because the point, he explains, “is that the *shape* of a human subject like Kutuzov or the Army Corps of Engineers is not better known *beforehand* than the *shape* of a river, of an angel, of a body, or of a brain releasing factor” (Latour, 2014, p. 12). Could we then define dialectic as that thing for which Aristotle and Marx, in their striving for tangibility, would probably not fail to argue to Latour that Kutuzov, to begin with, although he cannot be known beforehand he also cannot be reduced to a totally purified indetermination with a universalistic vocation, he is, for one thing, his father’s son.

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Form and Force

In memory of Mario Lavagetto

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Rahel Jaeggi recently observed how the definitions of capitalism often tend to represent its characteristics in terms of social or economic injustice, in relation to globalization or the decline of national autonomies, when they do not run the opposite risk of interpreting the mode of production as a synonym of modernity and reduce it to a subject of cultural criticism. What would be lacking in those kinds of approaches, Jaeggi argues, is the labour that no one has yet undertaken but that would remain to be tackled urgently, is an analysis of capitalism as a “form of life” (Fraser, Jaeggi, 2018, p. 14). Yet, it is precisely the expression “form of life” that appears in a passage of the *Prison Notebooks* that will perhaps be worth rereading, in view of an entry to the understanding of the philosophy of praxis¹ which allows us to grasp any protrusions with respect to a very fashionable notion such as that of *making*, developed by Tim Ingold. To set up this program, an enlightening premise could be provided by the confirmation of how Antonio Gramsci’s reflection is not in fact extraneous to the problems on which the immanent critique of capitalism as a form of life led by Rahel Jaeggi converges.

In particular, one of the properties that this critique attributes, with greater insistence, to “the different cultural forms that human life

¹ In the text I will use the term “philosophy of praxis” when I want to refer expressly to Antonio Gramsci’s critical proposal and “philosophy of practice” in the other cases.

can assume” is that of *inertia*. Forms of life “are inert bundles of social practices”, writes Rahel Jaeggi, that is to say that

they maintain “sedimentary elements”, praxis components that are not always accessible, explicit, or transparent. To put it differently, the practices formative of life forms can have states of aggregation ranging from more fluid to nearly fixed. We also have to take into account that social practices and forms of life are “materialized” in institutions and, even more “materially”, in architecture, tools, bodies, material structures which (though themselves the results of actions) make us act (Jaeggi, 2015, pp. 5-7).

Consequently the forms of life do not necessarily imply a choice, because individuals can adhere to the uses predisposed by their sedimentation without even knowing it: “They are patterns in which we act, patterns which allow us to act and yet which are at the same time constituted by our actions” (p. 17). If, on the one hand, inertia tends to overturn the relationship between the subject and the object, therefore giving the implementation of a pattern the initiative on which the possibilities of movement depend, on the other hand (“at the same time”) the persistence and the concrete forms of that pattern still depend on the subject they “make to act”. Gramsci also attributes a decisive meaning to these “sedimentary elements” inherent in the circular relationship between the subject and the object. In *Notebook 8* and *Notebook 11*, the problem arises with respect to the tendency of classical economics to identify the inertial dimension with nature, whereas for the philosophy of praxis it is rather a question of “noting how relatively ‘permanent’ forces are constituted in the historical development, operating with a certain regularity and automatism” (Gramsci, 1975, p. 1479). It is the same reason why, to each individual corresponds a multiplicity of “historical types” whose traces it is necessary to catalogue (p. 1376). In the first preface to *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, with an apparently paradoxical formula, Engels referred to the same necessity to establish that “according to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life”. Immediacy is

historically mediated and reproduced, so it happens that even just by using words like *dis-aster* or *dis-grace*, Gramsci writes, we inherit the wastes of astrology or the doctrine of predestination (pp. 1427-1428), because even the language in which we constitute ourselves “is both a living thing and a museum of fossils of life and past civilizations” (p. 1438). The philosophy of praxis, therefore, does not intend to assign to action a natural or vitalistic primacy over theory (which Gramsci regards rather as a figure of primitive mentalities), but to perceive in action an always contingent way of receiving and recombining the permanence of past ideologies.

The passage in which the various instances of nature, history, automatisms and philosophy merge in a more synthetic way, is probably the one in which Gramsci writes:

When dealing with the question of the “objectivity” of knowledge from the point of view of historical materialism, the point of departure should be the affirmation by Marx (a well-known passage in the introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*) that “men become conscious (of this conflict) on the ideological level” of juridical, political, religious, artistic, or philosophical forms. But is this consciousness limited solely to the conflict between the material forces of production and the relations of production – as Marx’s text literally states – or does it apply to all consciousness, that is, to all knowledge? This is the problem that can be worked out with the whole ensemble of the philosophical theory of the value of ideological superstructures. How is “monism” to be understood in this context? It is obviously neither idealistic nor materialistic “monism,” neither “Matter” nor “Spirit,” but rather “historical materialism,” that is to say, concrete human activity (history) namely, activity concerning a certain organized “matter” (material forces of production) and the transformed “nature” of man. Philosophy of the act (praxis), not of the “*pure act*” but rather of the “*impure*” – that is, the real – act, in the most secular sense of the word (Gramsci, 1996, pp. 176-177).

The activity of man can only remain within a definition of matter or nature which, precisely in function of their historically mediated and organized immediacy (Mann, 2009; Pizza, 2020, pp. 111-126), contaminate any metaphysical purification, inducing Gramsci to suspend judgement (“This is the problem”) on the same source (“Marx’s text”) to which he is referring his definition of objectivity. More precisely, the polemical reference to the pure act establishes an explicit comparison with the reflection of Giovanni Gentile, who in 1899 published his interpretation of the philosophy of practice with which Gramsci now seems willing to settle the bill. According to Gentile, Marx would have understood practice as “sensitive human activity”, production of the object but also “practice that overturns”, that is to say that it is determined in relation to the activity of objects “both practical and theoretical” which react to their origin in practice itself and modify it (Gentile, 2014, pp. 138-139). This way, Marx would have done nothing but “substitute the spirit with the body, the idea with meaning: and the products of the spirit [...] with economic facts”, which are the products of sensitive activity for the satisfaction of material needs (p. 223). But the “synthesis of cause with effect” that allows him to legitimately criticize Feuerbach, Gentile argues, remains anchored to an activity of sensible matter that philosophical reflection does not recognise, because matter as such is always identical to itself and it never changes: it is the forms that change. Clay is always clay, he explains, it is the vases that make the difference. And where there can be no change, that is to say in clay as a material, history cannot be involved either, which involves a coexistence of clay and a form (practice) that must therefore transcend sensible reality. The contradiction of Marx, therefore, would consist in having identified sensible reality with matter, while form and content, that is to say sensitive activity (practice) and matter (which in itself is “inert”) must remain distinct (pp. 231-232). And it is precisely this distinction that Gramsci rejects, promoting a philosophy of the “impure” act that claims a more constitutive relationship with the historical mediation of “Matter” and materials, their inertia and their impurities, namely their “Spirit”. In other words, it could be established that while it brings historical materialism back “to the Platonic view of ideas”, where the senses would simply substitute the spirit but retaining its “driving and creative functions

of universal reality" (p. 231), Gentile cannot help but grasp its contradiction by mobilizing an equally Platonic definition of matter as a passive receptacle of forms. The clay "inert" in itself, must in fact refer to an idea or a pure form of the clay-material which for the philosophy of praxis no longer has much to do with reality, which in a second draft of the passage previously reported, Gramsci invites us to consider not only "in the most profane", but "worldly sense of the word" (Gramsci, 1975, p. 1428). The same distance that separates the pure act from the impure act can emerge from the different connotations that the second *Thesis on Feuerbach* assumes in the translation of Gentile and in that of Gramsci. For the former, Marx would have argued that practice allows man to prove "the positivity" (*Diesseitigkeit*) of his own thought, whereas Gramsci translates the same word with the expression "earthly character" (Gramsci, 1975, p. 2355), referring to a solution of greater porosity between the subject and the object of knowledge (Frosini, 2004). But the divergence that is determined in relation to the two different interpretations of materialism would be confirmed above all by the examination of a second case of "translation" which finally brings us back to the problem posed by Rahel Jaeggi. Even Gentile, to clarify the notion of "practice that overturns", resorts to the rewording of the same page of the "Marx's text" on which Gramsci identified a "problem". And so he writes:

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The social man produces; and what does it produce? Capital. Here is the subject on the one hand, and the object on the other: the productive forces on the one hand and the products, capital on the other; hence the judicial forms. The practice is overturned; and the productive forces change and grow; and by growing they are in contradiction with the judicial forms already established with respect to another practice. But since in practice lies the indefectible, the necessary reality, development cannot stop; and the class struggle is immediately determined by the conflict between the productive forces and the forms of production, or the law, if you prefer (Gentile, 2014, p. 160).

At first glance, Gentile remains quite faithful to the “Marx’s text”, which in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* he said precisely:

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure. In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out (Marx, 1972, p. 21).

Except in those same lines, Marx is describing the path that led him from legal studies and from the critique of Hegel’s philosophy of right (1843) to the discovery “neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life”. It is in this perspective that he considers it necessary to specify the position that judicial forms and law will now have to occupy, which in the ensembles of “production relations” or of “material relations of existence” appear to be only an expression. In other words, it is the development of the discourse that motivates the reference to the equivalence between the relations of production and property relations, but only because it is important for Marx to clarify that the latter (that is, the subject he himself dealt with in his youth) has to be included in the definition of the former and not vice versa. On the contrary, by removing the paraphrase from the context and resolving it in the conflict “between the productive forces and the

forms of production, or the law, if you prefer”, Gentile carries out a reduction of social relations in the juridical forms that in addition to misinterpreting the “Marx’s text” leads him in a diametrically opposite direction with respect to the perplexities expressed by Gramsci. Who, in *Notebook 11*, by rewriting the paragraph on objectivity and the impure act, not only reaffirms that the conflict identified by Marx remains that “between the material forces of production and the relations of production – according to the letter of the text” (Gramsci, 1975, p. 1492), which obviously does not need any reference to the law, but in the immediately following paragraph of *Notebook 4*, wanting to tackle the “problem” that has just emerged from the reading of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, he quoted from memory some phrases which assume a decisive importance in the development of our reasoning. Gramsci writes:

This is the crucial problem of historical materialism, in my view. Basics for finding one’s bearings: 1) the principle that “no society sets itself tasks for the accomplishment of which the necessary and sufficient conditions do not already exist” [or are not in the course of emerging and developing]; and 2) that “no society perishes until it has first developed all the forms of life implicit in its internal relations” (check the exact wording of these principles) (Gramsci, 1996, p. 177).

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But as he will be able to verify shortly after returning to the literal translation of the text, the second element he indicated differs in a surprising way from Marx’s “exact enunciation” because as Gramsci himself wrote better: “A social formation does not perish before all the productive forces for which it is still sufficient are developed” (Gramsci, 1975, p. 2359). In the meantime, however, the productive forces (*alle Produktivkräfte*) will for a moment be transformed into “forms of life”, in fact, implying the substantial non-existence of a “pure” force, independent of the social forms in which it is expressed. The objectivity generated by the conflict, therefore, will necessarily be understood permanently, always “in the course of development and emergence”, as an immanent tension in historical mediation and to the automatisms that intervene and are

specified in the “earthly character” of any practice, not only the economic and revolutionary one. And so, through Gramsci’s critique and oversights, it would seem that one is projected into the exact point where Rahel Jaeggi has written:

By “form of life,” I mean social formations constituted through what I call “ensembles” of practices, and these include economic practices as well as social and cultural ones. The whole point of a “form of life” approach in this context is to understand economic practices as social practices – in a continuum with the other practices together and in connection to each other. If we can understand forms of life as more or less inert and more or less robust aggregate ensembles of social practices of different kinds, economic practices also belong within the scope of this context of practices. Economic practices are therefore not “the other,” but rather a part of the socio-cultural fabric of society (Fraser, Jaeggi, 2018, p. 198).

Where Gentile tended to purify the same relations of production, therefore, bringing them back to the force of law, in order to grasp this possible correlation between Gramsci’s “problem” and Rahel Jaeggi’s definition it is essential to move in the opposite direction, as we said, tending towards excluding the hypothesis of a practice external to the “juridical, political, religious, artistic or philosophical forms” that substantiate matter, because even the potter’s activity never deals with a clay that a moment before was just clay.

This then seems to me to be the terrain on which we could possibly set up a comparison between the philosophy of praxis and the notion of *making*, starting from a statement by Tim Ingold which immediately resonates with the results of a first comparison between the historical materialism as interpreted by Gramsci and that interpreted by Gentile. Ingold writes:

We are accustomed to think of making as a *project*. This is to start with an idea in mind, of what we want to achieve, and with a supply of the raw material needed to achieve it. And it is to finish at the moment when the material has

taken on the intended form. At this point, we say, we have produced an *artefact*. A nodule of stone has become an axe, a lump of clay a pot, molten metal a sword. Axe, pot and sword are instances of what scholars call *material culture*, a phrase that perfectly captures this theory of making as the unification of stuff supplied by nature with the conceptual representations of a received cultural tradition (Ingold, 2013, p. 20).

The “stuff supplied by nature” certainly refers to a clay that is always identical to itself, as Gentile might define it, which for Gramsci on the contrary can only be given in a form and supplied by history. Gentile, from this point of view, would be placed on the same level as economists for whom the inertia of automatisms is a character that identifies the natural dimension. To the *hylomorphism* of this conception, Ingold himself therefore opposes the *morphogenetic* principle according to which the *making* results in a “process of correspondence”, that is to say that it is not accomplished through “the imposition of a preconceived form on a raw material substance”, but with “bringing out or giving realization to the immanent potential in an evolving world”. We are clearly close to the Aristotelian form, no less implicit than the “forms of life” that Gramsci has incidentally placed in relation to material relations. Because of this, Ingold writes, the maker must be understood “as a participant in amongst a world of active materials” (Ingold, 2013, p. 21), seemingly the same ones that Gentile considered absurd. Yet to the “inert matter” still corresponds a force of inertia with which one side of Gentile’s reflection partially adheres to what in Gramsci’s perspective could be considered not only the “problem” in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, but also of the *making*. In fact, having defined as active the material that together with the maker participates in the production of the object, Ingold then immediately hastens to interpret their cooperation as a union of “forces”, which would allow the production process to operate “in anticipation of what might emerge”. Reading making longitudinally, therefore, means considering it “as a confluence of forces and materials, rather than laterally, as a transposition from image to object”, in order to finally understand it “as a form-generating

process" (p. 22). But the orientation of the causal link or the real hierarchy that in this way would be established between force and form, tends to isolate the "activity of taking shape" from the immanence of all other images and of all other forms that according to Gramsci, in order for there to be a force, concur to shape any product in relation to its statutory historical and social consistency, to its "earthly character".

Thus, in the absence of a necessary study, Ingold's longitudinal cut or morphogenetic process risk temporarily complying with the logic of what Marx defined as a Robinsonde, as if the product could really be determined outside the relations and sedimentations that by shaping the material characterize its activity. After all, Ingold's opinion on the status of automatisms appears quite evident when he writes that "as the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus is alleged to have said of the waters of a flowing river, you cannot step twice into the current of social life" (Ingold, 2018, p. 60). The repetition is only apparent, or rather phenomenal: these are the conclusions to which one might arrive after a first evaluation of the way in which the "form of life" itself (almost always in the singular) is characterized in Ingold's pages. In a text such as *The Perception of Environment*, for example, not only does this formula appear often but it is specified in relation to its philological source with a lexical choice that from our point of view could prove to be emblematic. Ingold writes:

Drawing an explicit parallel with tool-use, Wittgenstein made much the same point about the use of words in speech: different words have different uses, just as do the pen, watch and spectacles; one normally attends not to the words themselves but to what the speaker is telling us with them, and they are bound together solely by virtue of the fact that the various situations of use are all embedded within a total pattern of verbal and non-verbal activity, a form of life (Ingold, 2010, p. 407).

Ingold then establishes an identity between the *form* and the *model* (*a total pattern of verbal and non-verbal activity, a form of life*) which albeit with some internal oscillations (Majetschak, 2010), does not

necessarily find a correspondence in Wittgenstein's philosophy, where the models of life (*Lebensmuster*) would rather indicate the psychological and individual relationship with the forms (Moyal-Sharrock, 2015). And in this way, the forms would risk taking on a more derivative or in any case external function with respect to the immanence of uses. It is not surprising then that in an attempt to document the hypothesis of a possible influence of Gramsci (through Piero Sraffa) in the reflections of the later Wittgenstein, Franco Lo Piparo wrote:

In Gramsci the terms "linguistic game" and "form of life" are missing. However, the notion of *praxis*, is central to Gramscian philosophy, a term and concept that entered Wittgenstein's theoretical lexicon starting from 1936 [where] it does not indicate a generic action. If this were the case, it could be given a subjectivistic and individualistic meaning. The term instead refers, in the style of the Gramscian philosophy of praxis, to stable forms of life (Lo Piparo, 2014, pp. 75-87).

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But also with reference to the discovery of their fortuitous appearance, the forms of life effectively replace a term (the productive forces) to which the philosophy of praxis and the *Prison Notebooks* cannot grant the "subjectivistic and individualistic meaning" that would seem to connote the "form of life" that is the "model" defined by Ingold. A third angle from which to grasp the same "problem", relates to the concept of "abstraction", which Ingold interprets exclusively in terms of the loss of all the specific characteristics of the concrete situation (Ingold, 2014, p. 12). In the case of a job, for example, the abstraction would be what would lead to neglect the contingency of relationships, of the use of materials and of the way in which skills are acquired and applied. It is, precisely, the labour abstracted from the "matrix of social relations within which it takes its specific form". For this reason Ingold proposes to call the peculiar and socially incorporated form of human activities no longer "work", but "task", implicitly postulating the possibility of resolving the social dimension in a flow of interactions that escape abstract work just like the flow of an actuality in which it is impossible to

sink the same foot twice. Because the parallel that Ingold has established with Heraclitus' river, evidently, insists on the same premise that the "material processes" involving human activity do not differ from what happens and what we can observe daily "in plants and animals, in waves of water, snow and sand, in rocks and clouds", so much so that "the difference between a marble statue and a rock formation such as a stalagmite, for example, is not that one has been made and the other not". Rather, the difference must be sought in the fact that

at some point in the formative history of this lump of marble, first a quarryman appeared on the scene who, with *much force* and with the assistance of hammers and wedges, wrested it from the bedrock, after which a sculptor set to work with a chisel in order, as he might put it, to release the form from the stone. But as every *chip of the chisel* contributes to the emergent form of the statue, so every drop of supersaturated solution from the roof of the cave contributes to the form of the stalagmite. When subsequently, the statue is worn down by rain, the form-generating process continues, but now without further human intervention (Ingold, 2013, pp. 21-22: Italics added by me).

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We will then say that a broader exploration of the terrain on which the philosophy of praxis and the *making* can be compared, will necessarily have to start from this tendency towards the naturalization of historical and social incorporations (with their "sedimentary elements" and their "forms of life") in the element of energy and force, a "problem" which, in relation to the identification of the statues with stalagmites or of the sculptor with rain, Gramsci would probably have begun to address, provided that "when one affirms that a reality would exist even if man did not exist, one makes a metaphor or one falls into a form of mysticism" (Gramsci, 1975, p. 1416).

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Form and History

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One of the problems that seem to animate Michel Foucault's reflection in the early seventies would seem to be that of the relationship between historical research and the liberation of the subject. In the period separating the *Lectures on the Will to Know* (1970-1971) from "*Society must be defended*" (1975-1976), we witness a series of shifts within the abandonment of the archaeological perspective that could already imply the pressure exerted by the subject on the boundaries of the forms in which it is historically produced and represented. If history really can only advance from one dominant regime to the next, what is undermined is the very possibility of understanding what the dynamics of this progression are. To tackle this problem, Foucault relies on a work plan that at least until January 31, 1973 he will indifferently call *dynastic* or *genealogy*. "After an archaeological type of analysis – he says – it is a matter of undertaking a dynastic, genealogical type of analysis, focusing on filiations on the basis of power relations" (Foucault, 2015, p. 84). The synonymy is certainly provisional, but the articulations of a much less extemporaneous concept such as that of genealogy allows us to clarify the tendency in which the later aborted hypothesis of the dynastic takes place, whose place of appearance and experimentation is essentially reduced to the notes about the course on *Penal Theories and Institutions* (1971-1972).

The term is introduced in reference to the “manifestation of power”, which is always placed in relation to someone it must represent, on the basis of certain hierarchies and in precise circumstances. Then Foucault adds: “For these ceremonies, rituals, gestures *don't mean anything*. They do not fall under a semiology, but under an analysis of forces (of their interplay, their strategy). The marks that appear here must be analyzed not [through] a semiotics of the elements, but in a dynastic of forces” (Foucault, 2019, p. 45). The ceremonies, rituals and gestures through which power is manifested – both in the sense of a power that is staged and that of the power relations to which the spectacle of power can be traced back and which therefore makes them visible – they do not convey meanings but a strategy. The dynastic is therefore characterized in immediate opposition to semiotics, because where signs could appear, it only captures “the mark” of the forces at work in the unfurling of a form. And what is meant by *la marque* Foucault had already explained it during a conference dedicated to Nietzsche and delivered at the University of McGill (Montréal) in April 1971. The dual property of the mark was that of *multiplying* and *identifying* the relations external to knowledge that prelude to our position in reality and of which knowledge itself remains only an effect. Multiplying the relation means extending the domain of knowledge and therefore increasing the number of relations to which the mark (as an act of force) imposes the identifying seal of known reality. The work carried out by the mark, therefore, consists in simultaneously producing the subject of knowledge to which an objective reality corresponds and the object corresponding to the force expressed in the generation of this correspondence (Foucault, 2013, pp. 211-212). In the last lesson of *Penal Theories and Institutions* which he held on March 8, 1972, the same day in which he specifies the definition of the mark (and therefore of the dynastic) in relation to the sign, Foucault's notes refer to the “Nietzschean analysis which looks behind knowledge for something altogether different from knowledge”, that is to say “something altogether different in relation to which the knowing subject and knowledge itself are effects” (Foucault, 2019, p. 213). This is evidently analysis that supports his essay on *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* and the assumption that “humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it

arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination" (Foucault, 1977, p. 151). Genealogy, therefore, will have to re-establish "the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of dominations" (p. 150).

Yet the radication of knowledge on "something completely other" which generates at the same time the subject and the object most suited to the continuation of war in a system of rules, seems to refer to a second incubation of the investigation that Foucault is leading now on the terrain of historical research (Mezzadra, 2008). It was in fact Étienne Balibar, in the preliminary pages to the theory of transition in which he would have introduced his own definition of genealogy, to have expressed the need for *different histories* in these terms:

The determination of the objects of these histories must await that of the relatively autonomous instances of the social formation, and the production of concepts which will define each of them by the structure of a *combination*, like the mode of production. We can predict that these definitions, too, will always be *polemical* definitions, i.e., they will only be able to constitute their objects by destroying ideological classifications or divisions which benefit from the obviousness of the 'facts'. Attempts like that of Foucault give us a good example of this (Balibar, 2015, p. 524).

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The attempt to which Balibar refers in the footnote is "above all" that of *The Birth of the Clinic*, the same one to which Foucault refers in September 1972 to emphasize how in the two preceding books *The Order of Things* he had already encountered the need to set up "the analysis of the power relations that underlie and make possible the appearance of a type of discourse", that is to say a "dynastic of knowledge" (Foucault, 1997). However, Marx had already made a similar attempt which had been possible to translate into the limits of the "right break of periodization", Balibar argues, that is, into a mode of analysis which, while generating alternative objects to those of the ideological sections, reaffirmed the principle according

to which “history, without ceasing to unfold in the linear flux of time, becomes intelligible as the relationship between an essential permanence and a subordinate movement” (Balibar, 2015, p. 458). Men themselves, in this theoretical perspective, can only appear in the form of supports to the relations involved in the structure, and the forms of their individuality as determined effects of the structure, entailing a total correspondence between the possibilities of the constitution of the subject and the dynamics of subjection. In other words, the question that a “history as a science” will have to answer will be that relating to the *combination* on which the elements to be analysed depend, but if all the elements and their movement remain subordinated to the permanence of a dominant structure, how is it possible to think of the passage from one combination to another? This is the problem that Marx would have solved in the chapter on the so-called primitive accumulation of capital, Balibar argues, where the passage is thought in terms of the elements and not of the structures, that is, in terms of a “genealogy” consistent with the discovery of a mode of production that “is constituted by ‘finding already there’ the elements which its structure combines” (p. 570). Characterizing the “transition” would then not only be the “forms of non-correspondence” between the elements and their combination, which in this regard could more appropriately be defined as “pseudo-combinatory”, but the “coexistence between different modes of production” or of different anthropological matrices that enter into a simultaneous and hierarchical relationship as “relations of domination” (p. 606).

In acknowledging Foucault’s attempt to connect history to the “relatively autonomous instances of social formation” and which are therefore not fully included in the “normative and regulated forms of discourse” which Foucault himself had later declared that he wanted to address in *The Order of Things* (1966), *Balibar’s Elements for a Theory of Transition* (1965) seem to actually pave the way and address the problems of a genealogy that the programme of the “dynastic” develops in the notes of *Penal Theories and Institutions*. Here, the relatively autonomous instances of social formation that Foucault examines are those of the *Nu-Pieds*, a movement which in 1639, rising against the exacerbation of the tax burden

in Normandy, had made it clear that the feudal aristocracy was no longer able to ensure its control over the land. The army managed to regain control then, but on the one hand we witnessed the summary execution of peasants and beggars, while on the other the spectacle of war will have to begin to deepen the fault lines that separate the various parts of the social body, giving the urban bourgeoisie the opportunity to willingly surrender. Therefore, in this refraction of war, it is already possible to observe the combination of a power that does not just suppress, but at the same time sets a norm, that is, a more desirable form of subjection. When the power will be able to obtain the same result without bloodshed, when it has accepted the objections of the reformers, even the new *semio-technique* of punishment will not derogate from *the rule of lateral effects*, as Foucault defines it in *Discipline and Punish*, that is to say the evidence that “penalty must have its most intense effects on those who have not committed the crime” (Foucault, 1995, p. 95). But in the meantime the sedition of the *Nu-Pieds* will have shown what is the legacy that pre-state forms of repression are about to hand over to new technologies of control and regulation of the population. The army would have remained at the gates of Rouen, in fact, where civil justice intervened only in the early days of 1640, creating the favourable interval for the bourgeoisie to settle in the political space between the decline of feudalism and the rise of the seditious classes. Except that keeping soldiers in the countryside was expensive, as well as weakening the borders, so the functions of internal warfare would soon be transferred to the armament of a new militia, the police, of which *Penal Theories and Institutions* intends to outline the dynastic. Foucault writes:

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[...] the bourgeoisie under the Revolution, but especially in the Napoleonic period, carried out a separation:

- it truly got rid of feudal (seigneurial or parliamentary) justice, which, due to its form and purpose it could not use;
- it rejected the purpose of the new repressive system which was established in the seventeenth century (imposition of feudal rent) but not the form (or certain formal elements at least: the police element). It uses these elements for its own

ends. And these ends are no longer the imposition of feudal rent, but the maintenance of capitalist profit (Foucault, 2019, p. 23).

The police, Foucault concludes, is not a response to delinquency or a direct emanation of the economic structure, but a military solution to the problem of revolts against power: a *form* that changes *destination*, an *element already formed* – perhaps Balibar would have said – which the structure of capitalism meets and absorbs in its own workings.

Thus, the precise reference of this absorption to the epoch of the Revolution and of the Empire, would seem to support the thesis of Jacques Guilhaumou who identifies the dynastic with the most adequate instrument for understanding the transition from the *Ancien Régime* to the revolutionary period, beyond which, however, it would no longer have “reason to persist as an analytic notion, giving way to the notion of genealogy” (Guilhaumou, 2016, p. 34; Guilhaumou, 2018). Yet, in the interview cited from 1972, Foucault does not seem at all willing to define the field of the dynastic programme within the boundaries established by Guilhaumou. On the contrary, it is always to the relationship between form and destination that he could refer any attempt to associate discourses with “historical conditions, economic conditions, political conditions of their appearance and formation” (Foucault, 1997, p. 72), just as in *Penal Theories and Institutions* had happened to the police element. This also applies to the speeches held at the Collège de France, for example, where according to Foucault

the transmission of knowledge through word, through the professorial word in classrooms, in a space, in an institution such as a university, or a college, it matters little, this mode of transmission of knowledge is now completely obsolete. It is an archaism, a kind of power relationship in fact, which still drags along like an empty shell. Even when the professor no longer has real power over the students, the form of this power relationship remains – we haven’t completely gotten rid of it yet. I believe that the professor’s word is necessarily an archaic word (p. 77).

In this case one would say that it is the form that forces the destination, but reiterating a power relationship that obstructs the transmission of knowledge still means using that same form “for one’s own ends”, as Foucault had pointed out of the “repressive system put in place in the 16th century”, that is to say, committing it to a peculiar outcome. Therefore, in the case of the lectures at the Collège de France, even if they fall outside the historical relevance of the dynastic hypothesized by Guilhaumou, they fall within the domain of “non-correspondence” or simultaneous concurrency between different modes of production which opposes the “relatively autonomous instances of social formation”, as Balibar defined them, to the “normative and regulated forms of discourse” with which Foucault identified the limit of movement of archaeology. The same indication therefore seems to emerge from this passage of an interview in which Foucault recounts:

I was recently reading an article in “La Pensée”, which was beautifully written, by a guy I know well, one of Althusser’s collaborators named Balibar. This article interests me, but I cannot help but smile as I read it, since it is a matter of showing in twenty pages, starting with a sentence or two from Marx, that Marx had perfectly foreseen the transformation of the state apparatus within the revolutionary process and in some way from the very beginning of the revolutionary process itself (p. 72).

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The article to which he is referring is entitled *La rectification du Manifeste Communiste* and in Balibar’s intentions it would actually pose the problem of the form that the state can take within the revolutionary process. But in reality, Balibar’s conclusions do not attribute to Marx any foresight, on the contrary, they could be paraphrased as a criticism of the very idea that it is possible to anticipate a definition of the preliminary forms of the conflicts in which they are determined. Balibar writes: “The existence of the state apparatus achieves the political domination of the ruling class in a ‘transformed form’, although it is in no way at the origin of this domination. At the origin of domination we can only have the relation of the forces internal to the class struggle” (Balibar, 1974, p. 92). The only determination that remains plausible to hypothesize, therefore, is that of “transformed form”, precisely because

on the one hand the overturning of the power relations creates the conditions for a “new form” (p. 81), but on the other hand the principle remains valid that this form too must correspond to the articulation of already constituted elements in a new structure. Balibar, after all, had already stated this in the previous pages: “If ‘democracy’ and ‘despotism’ are political forms or ‘systems’ defined at the level of what Marx also calls social ‘superstructures’, so is any combination more or less contradictory of these forms. [The political form] therefore does not have a reason in itself, at its own level, but only in its relationship with a material ‘basis’ or better still: with the overall process in which it is constituted on a material basis” (p. 79).

The contradictory combination in question is the “dictatorship of the proletariat”, of which Balibar excludes that a more meaningful definition than that of “transformed form” can be given outside the material process. At this point, then, it is worth resuming the reasoning that Foucault is developing in relation to the article by Balibar, to which he recognizes a number of reasons.

Balibar shows with great erudition – continues Foucault – with a great aptitude for explaining the text, that Marx had said it, had foreseen it. So I admire him, as it is a good explanation of the text, and I smile because I know why Balibar does it. He does so because in fact, in the real practice of politics, in real revolutionary processes, the solidity, the permanence of the bourgeois State apparatus, even in the socialist States, is a problem that can be encountered, and one that can be encountered now. It would seem equally important to me to pose this problem starting from the real historical data that are at our disposal, the permanence of the structures of the State, for example the permanence of the structures of the Tsarist army within the Red Army itself at the time of Trotsky, which it is a real historical problem; therefore I believe that the Marxist problem of the State must be solved starting from problems like the latter and not starting from an explanation of the texts in order to know whether Marx had foreseen it or not... (Foucault, 1997, p. 73)

The permanence of a tsarist structure within the Red Army, evidently, poses the same problem that in *Penal Theories and Institutions* concerned the form and destination of the police element, contradicting the hypothesis that the dynastic perspective, for Foucault, can be applied only to the historical period indicated by Jacques Guilhaumou. And it is a problem that Balibar himself, albeit in more theoretical terms, continues to develop in the passage from the “pseudo-combinatory” of *Reading Capital* to the definition of a “transformed form” which abstracting from the “overall process in which it is constituted on a material basis” cannot be further determined. However, these are cases in which we always have to deal with the reappearance of an already constituted element to the surface of a historical and political conjuncture that re-functionalises its permanence. In an attempt to name this internal tension in Foucault’s work, Paul Veyne will relate it to what Heinrich Wölfflin had defined “the general plastic form of an era” (Veyne, 2001, p. 40).

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At this point, however, it does not seem correct to argue with Hinrich Fink-Eitel that “Foucault appropriates the concept and procedure of genealogy only thanks to a new comparison of his own thought with the work of Nietzsche”, which would have led him to deconstruct the most consolidated historical contexts “in a plurality of contingent fields of origin and in a multiplicity of evolutionary lines that cross each other” (Fink-Eitel, 2002, p. 62). Because if the hesitation between the dynastic perspective and the genealogical one that we are accounting for really aims to grasp in the emergence of history “a certain number of levels, a certain number of mechanisms and modes of functioning”, as Foucault himself asserts, it is precisely “to Marx that we owe the possibility of conducting all these analyses” (Foucault, 1997, p. 73; Catucci, 2018).

A few months later, in the introductory lectures to the 1972-1973 course, the articles relating to the debate on the law against wood theft will have made Marx a model to “see how to analyse political discussions, oppositions, and struggles of discourse within a given political situation”. Articles in which, it must be said, it would not be odd to surprise Marx struggling with a problem internal to the relationship between form and destination, using Foucault’s words, since they attribute the bourgeois law the double re-functionalization

by which “the landowners exploit the progression of time, which is the refutation of their claims, to usurp at the same time the private punishment of the barbaric conception and the public punishment of the modern conception” (Marx, 1950, p. 212). In other words, it is precisely capitalism that is formed by ‘finding’ already formed the elements that its structure combines. And if now “it is a question of making a dynastic, genealogical analysis, based on filiations beginning with power relations”, that is to say “finding which are the power relations that have made possible the historical rise of something”, further, it is the way in which an element already formed contributes to the functioning of a structure that modifies its destination that attracts Foucault’s gaze. Who writes:

We have therefore two ensembles: the penal ensemble, characterized by the prohibition and the sanction, the law; and the punitive ensemble, characterized by the coercive penitentiary system. The first ensemble brings with it a certain theory of the infraction as an act of hostility towards society; the second brings with it the practice of confinement. The first is deduced, in an archeologically correct fashion, from the State institutionalization of justice, which means that, from the Middle Ages, we have a practice of justice organized by reference to the exercise of sovereign political power [...] The other ensemble is formed in a movement of development, not of the State itself, but of the capitalist mode of production; in this second system, we see this mode of production provide itself with the instruments of a political power, but also of a moral power. The genealogical problem then, is how these two ensembles, of different origin, came to be added to each other and function within a single tactic (Foucault, 2015, p. 111).

To operate the conjunction of these two ensembles is the very application of a tactic, which therefore does not limit itself to leaving signs on the already constituted elements (object of a semiology) but the implication of a specific power relation, the imprint of the function which their combination is assigning to them, a mark. Then as Alessandro Pandolfi wrote, marks “are

signatures, symbols, rituals, gestures, postures and speeches whose meaning lies in the use made of them to corroborate or shift, unbalance or rebalance power relations" (Pandolfi, 2016). In the definition that Foucault will give in 1976, on the contrary, once the genealogy will no longer have to do with what "can be inferred in an archaeologically correct way" and any reference to the dynastic will have disappeared from the picture, the emphasis will seem to fall on the negative of the marking intended as knowledge of the people and local memory, a potential that the mark itself has dispersed and that the genealogical perspective allows to re-launch "in contemporary tactics" (Foucault, 2003, p. 8). To understand this exuberance or this dispersion of forms, Balibar had introduced the motif of the "non-correspondence" between the elements and their structural function, attributing the discovery to the "genealogical" work conducted by Marx in the chapter on the so-called primitive accumulation. With Nietzsche's genealogy, according to Foucault, it would therefore have been a matter of following the complex process of any "origin" while maintaining "what happened to it in its proper dispersion", that is to say "identify the accidents and the minute deviations" bearing in mind that every inherited form "is not an acquisition, a possession that grows and solidifies; rather, it is an unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers that threaten the fragile inheritor from within or from underneath" (Foucault, 1977, p. 146). In any case, in their contiguity, non-correspondence and what happens in the dispersion of origins, deconstruct any acquisition including that of the forms in which the systems of subjection and their historical representation are determined.

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Form and Gender

Spiritism appears to have originated in Heydesville, New York, where Margaret and Kate Fox organized what they themselves would have called the greatest scam of the century many years later. A scam hatched against their mother, initially, distraught by the mysterious nocturnal noises that the two sisters enjoyed making by cracking the bones of their feet. A third sister would have immediately sensed an economic opportunity in the sadism taking place in the house and thus, in November 1849, after having stocked up on the famous tables, the spirits could finally perform at the Corinthian Hall in Rochester before the incredulous eyes of twelve hundred paying spectators. Just three years later they landed in England, where the mania that had already infected seven hundred and fifty thousand Americans was taken over by the scientist Michael Faraday, who, having had a table with a top made of two boards separated by a layer of marbles built and having been able to see that to animate the seances this way, was only the board that remained in contact with the hands of the participants, he deemed that the whole matter could be due to the unconscious actions of the muscles. But once the enigma of the tables was solved, which in any case would have continued to slither in parlours all over Europe, it was still necessary to understand the

reasons that animated the ectoplasms and the strange apparitions that starting from 1861, with the invention of spirit photography, ensured that ghosts had an extraordinary increment in audience and evidence.

In the spring of 1874, for this purpose, the Society of Physics of the University of St. Petersburg set up a commission for the study of mediumistic phenomena which, according to Dmitry Ivanovič Mendeleev, the inventor of the periodic table of elements, denied apparitions the mitigating factors of good faith and sarcastically entrusts them to the attentions of psychiatrists (Mendeleev, 1992, p. 64; Rice, 1998). But the attitude taken by the commission would immediately have irritated Dostoevsky, who follows Mendeleev's lecture report on the "Nòvoe Vremja" and notes in his diary:

This scientific "haughtiness" is not enough for our spiritualists, not enough even in the event that the commission was correct. And this is the whole problem. [...] In fact, everything else that the commission has to say is almost as presumptuous as this: "They are frivolous people," the commission says, "and they themselves are unconsciously pushing the table, and that is what makes it rock; they want to deceive themselves, and so the table makes tapping sounds; their nerves are frayed; they sit there in the dark; it's an accordion playing; little hooks have been placed in their shirtsleeves" [...]; "they lift the table with the tips of their feet" etc. etc. And still this will convince none of those who want to be led astray (Dostoevsky, 1993, pp. 461-462).

The same accusation made by Dostoevsky, that of not having been able to recognize in spiritualism "something that must be treated with more regard" (Vinitsky, 2008), art historian John Harvey would later make his own many years later. In fact, it is true that spirit photography represents in the first place a new frontier of profit that the pioneer of the discipline himself, William Mumler, does not hesitate to cross, in the same era, no less, in which to perform strange prodigies are also the tables to which Marx, in the first book of the *Capital*, entrusts the task of illustrating the fetishistic character of

commodities. But this profit, in the atelier that the photographer inaugurated in New York during the American Civil War, is ensured by a socialization of mourning to which religions and traditional knowledge, evidently, no longer knew what to offer (Harvey, 2007 p. 141). The precipitations of history accumulate more corpses than the church, institutions or morality are able to bury and so the dead reappear in portraits, next to their loved ones, who do not spare any expense as long as the new technology gives back a more accessible form to the pain they are examining. The spirit, as Edgar Allan Poe wrote in *Shadow: A Parable*, is also the frightening shadow of a multitude speaking to us “in the well-remembered and familiar accents of many thousand departed friends”.

A few months before Mendeleev’s lectures, an event occurred in the seventh criminal chamber of the Seine Court which would seem to confirm the findings of Harvey and Dostoevsky. In fact, despite the confession and subsequent conviction of a self-proclaimed ghost photographer, the victims of the scam did not want to give up on the idea of having posed next to the ghost of a dead aunt, of the countess du Barry, of Vercingetorix or a pre-Columbian superhero. In reality, the photographer’s trick turned out to be rather rudimentary and consisted in exposing twice the same plate: the first time with the blurred image of a doll in costume, the second with the portrait of the clients (Leymarie, 1875; Chéroux, 2004). But at the time, it must be said, the idea that the lens was able to capture much more reality than the retina retained had enjoyed considerable fortune, so much so that Hippolyte Baraduc, for example, could devote several years of his career to the photographic research of souls. Unlike Vercingetorix or the deceased, however, what the souls handed to the observer was no longer their own image, but a “signature” (Baraduc, 1897, p. 10), a singular imprint of light which, from time to time, took the specific form of passion, of a nightmare or of the vital energy that hit the plate. In other words, technological innovation allows us to carry out experiments that the scientist is not yet able to govern, but which would still provide experimental proof of how right Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas were in arguing that “the soul takes the form of thought” (p. 14).

Also because in the meantime, despite having directed its heavy

artillery against the state of agitation of the apparitions, scientific research must measure itself with a series of inventions that tended to make ghosts more and more plausible: Edison's phonograph, Nipkow's scanning disk, wireless communication, cinema and X-rays, in the years of the *Belle Époque* and a progress deeply inherent in the desire of an entire historical block to be duped, restore a subject much more disembodied than what is expected by the traditional boundaries between the positive datum and the mediumistic phenomenon. The cathode-ray tube perfected in 1878 leads William Crooks to postulate the existence of a *radiant matter* of which the spirits must be made of, according to Cesare Lombroso. And thus, technology seems to nourish the formation of a "science of the unknown", as Jurgis Baltrušaitis defines it, which "the more it subtilizes, the more it purifies its notions, the more it tries to give itself strong grounding, the more it gets lost in the fantastic" (Baltrušaitis, 1989). The "thoughtographs" of Dr. Baraduc represent a fairly innocent chapter in the genealogy of this intelligence of inexplicable things, which more generally includes the rapports that the images had already established and will continue to entertain psychiatry.

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Also in Paris and always in 1875, a much less innocent protagonist of the same story dies: his name is Duchenne de Boulogne and in 1862 he wrote a book titled *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine* which, unlike Baraduc's works, does not limit itself to collecting the traces of the free circulation of the spirit, but arranges for its capture. When the soul is agitated, says Duchenne citing Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*, the face is transformed into a living picture on which the action of muscles creates the image corresponding to the movement of the passions. But proceeding in the opposite direction, it is possible to obtain the same image with the use of an electric current, summoning on the electrified face a complete catalogue of the inner motions and the secret mechanisms that regulate their combinations. The doctor assures: "Through electro-physiological analysis and with the help of photography I will introduce you to the art of correctly painting the expressive lines of the human face, an art that could be defined as orthography of physiognomy in motion" (Duchenne de Boulogne, 1862, pp. V-VI). His would seem

an academy teacher's program, a sampling of pathognomic constants similar to those illustrated by the theoretical writings of Leonardo da Vinci, by Charles Lebrun's *Expression des passions de l'Âme* or by Rubens' *Théorie de la figure humaine*. And indeed, writes Duchenne, "the greatest masters of the Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo (who could be reproached for having abused it) and many others whose genius has been strengthened by science, they show us with their magnificent works what advantage can be gained from anatomical knowledge" (p. 56). But this is still a partial advantage, he adds a few pages later, because "only photography, as faithful as a mirror, could achieve the desirable perfection" (p. 65). In this regard, it will not be needless to remember that starting from the Parisian *Salon* of 1859, with a decision that Baudelaire would have famously judged ridiculous, photography had been officially welcomed into the great world of fine arts, if it were not that the desirable perfection to which Duchenne is now referring is that of the faces of lab rats disfigured by needles and pliers. But this is precisely the equipment with which Duchenne, according to Foucault, obtains

the striking reemergence of surface values within medical discourse and knowledge. It is this surface that must be covered in all its hollows and bumps, and practically by looking only, by looking only that far. In fact, and no doubt even more than this clinical re-validation of the almost impressionistic values of the surface, what is important and, I think, decisive, in this new clinical capture of the neurological patient, and in the correlative constitution of a neurological body before this gaze and apparatus of capture, is that the neurological examination is basically looking for "responses" (Foucault, 2006, p. 299).

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Therefore, with Duchenne de Boulogne, the neurological body is what constitutes itself through "the substitution of the schema of stimulus-response for the schema of stimulus-effect" (p. 300), allowing a less passive presence of the soul to emerge to the surface of the face, a *spirit* to which the neurologist now seems to order to come out into the open or to make a noise. This seems

to be the epistemological terrain on which psychiatry and spiritualism end up side by side, both relying on photographic evidence. Duchenne would soon be considered a “master” in the clinical use of photography and electrodes by Charcot, who in 1862 began to direct the Salpêtrière, a women’s asylum where he will not neglect to set up a photography laboratory and an electrotherapy laboratory.

Having positioned itself in a border area between medicine and philosophy, a territory on which it must extend and legitimize its intervention, the gestation of psychiatric knowledge, first of all, needs evidence. It is necessary to heal, of course, but at the same time it is necessary to show, exhibit, document, in a rhetorical perspective inaugurated by the appearance of a new literary genre, the *case reports*, which Charcot’s lectures in the Salpêtrière amphitheatre would push to the limit of theatrical performance. Indeed, the horizon of expectation that stimuli must satisfy changes – passing from *effects* to *responses* or camouflaging the former, more properly, in the latter – but the knowledge of doctors remains bound to a very precise and coherent client. To grasp its mandate it will therefore be worth referring to an infamous booklet written in 1771 by Jean Baptiste Louis de Thesacq, known as Bienville, which in the Venetian translation of 1786 will be entitled *La Nymphomanie, ou Traité de la fureur utérine*. In the last lines of the book, Bienville ascribes to himself “the glory of having laid the first stone of a building” (Bienville, 1886, p. 185) and although the term does not yet exist (it will end up in dictionaries only in 1842), it is not forced to identify it with fledgling psychiatry. Which, then, will have to deal with imagination, where disorders arise that can then degenerate into the organic inflammation of the uterus. As for the root causes of these disorders, Bienville looks up from the patient’s scandalous body and writes:

The laws of society are public needs to which it is convenient to sacrifice a quantity of private needs. These laws establish certain remedies and preservatives that it was necessary to imagine to repair real ills, which would destroy or at least subvert the existing order, which is as advantageous as it is necessary. For this reason, rights and suitable limits for

each sex have also been established. The honest and ordinary education derives from this principle and is subject to this remedy. It follows that women are raised with restraint and decency often capable of irritating their passions, of causing a revolution and disorder in the physical of their nature and of making them victims of the *public good* (p. 140).

Four years later, in the *Traité des Erreurs Populaires sur la Santé*, Bienville could attribute the “decadence of the species” not only to those “young people that the artificial development of passions has made precocious”, similar to the “flames that by dint of being too feeble do not heat and ignite anything”, but also to the apparently opposed army of “subjects overwhelmed by the sad inheritance of the diseases of their fathers or weakened by the vices of excessive education”, equally unprepared to respect the injunction to grow and multiply (Bienville, 1775, p. 24). If Bienville’s first stone has value, it is above all to highlight the distance that separates it from a second inaugural text, a circular letter published in France in 1785 and titled *Instruction sur la manière de gouverner les Insensés, et de travailler à leur guérison dans les Asyles qui leur sont destinés* (Quétel, 2009, p. 182). The circular reacts to the pressures of some philanthropic circles who have expressed their disdain for the conditions in which individuals locked up in the poorhouses, where the insane are relegated together with criminals, prostitutes, orphans and tramps. Now the government recognizes a peculiar status to the insane and declares the intention to classify their sufferings, to ensure above all the poor a more adequate shelter (*Instruction*, 1785, pp. 6-8), but the overall profile of the patient is that of the victim not anymore of public good, but of bad luck. And is in this humanitarian perspective – as we would perhaps define it today, a perspective that for Didier Fassin would have incubated precisely in French psychiatry towards the end of the millennium (Fassin, 2012, pp. 21-43) – that on 27 August 1793 Philippe Pinel arrived at the men’s hospice in Bicêtre, from where less than two years later he was transferred to the Salpêtrière. Psychiatry was born to free the unfortunate from their chains: this is notoriously the scene handed down by his son Scipion and then confirmed by the two

famous paintings that in 1849 and 1878, both commissioned by doctors, portray Pinel in the role of the liberator. Yet, re-reading the *Traité médico-philosophique sur l'aliénation mentale*, we must actually recognize that in the new speciality of medical art invoked from Bienville the total transformation of the victims of the public good into the victims of themselves or of destiny has not yet been completed. It is true, the alienated will be subjected to the regulations of a structure faithful "to the principles of purer philanthropy", but the alienation continues to often be the result of a pain or love opposed with too much violence. It will rather be with Pinel's first student – Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol – that the public good will begin to surreptitiously leave the scene. In fact, when in 1815 he wrote the entry "Érotomanie" for the dictionary of medical sciences, indeed, Esquirol had already transformed the loves and pains opposed with too much violence (and that is, the results of a, perhaps, excessively rigid but socially conforming education) in the loves or pains resulting from "a dissolute upbringing" (Esquirol, 185, p. 192), in which it is precisely the laws of social reproduction that are the first not to be reflected. Thus, eight years later, the nymphomania of Voisin (Esquirol's student) may depend exclusively on the dimensions of the cerebellum, where Franz Joseph Gall had housed the organ of sexual function and where the public good – evidently – had nothing to do with it anymore.

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It appears that this is the tendency that images must favour and support, facilitating the shift of disease from political causes to the experience of bodies, functions, the face or to the misfortune of the sick. For example, Voisin writes in 1826, anticipating in many ways the programme of *retrospective medicine* of Charcot and Richer:

Every day we can observe individuals who, due to an incomplete organization, remain indifferent to the relationship with the other sex. Among the men who have trod the world stage and have shown this particularity, we can mention Newton, Charles XII and Kant. As Gall observed, the portraits of these famous men show, and certainly beyond the artist's intentions, that their neck was not very wide and consequently their cerebellum poorly developed (Voisin, 1826, p. 242).

But in 1805, when Esquirol was discussing his doctoral thesis, the need to make visible the accuracy of what was happening at the Salpêtrière, was already causing a significant attraction of alienism to physiognomy. The mental alienation does not imply any organic injury, Esquirol argues, but rather an alteration of a functional nature caused by an increase in passion. If on the one hand, transferring the disease from the tissues to the functions allows him to promote the benefits of moral treatment, on the other hand, he undermines it with the need to create evidence, because the functions unlike organs do not end up on the anatomist's table. And so the signs cancelled by the overcoming of the organicistic paradigm reappear on the face, just where the theory of painting had abandoned them. Esquirol writes: "These physiognomic traits, these organ effects are observed in maniacs at even more pronounced levels. To grasp the features of the physiognomy of the alienated one should draw the heads of many of them, keeping in each the character of physiognomy during access and comparing these heads with those in which the greatest masters have applied themselves to paint the passions" (Esquirol, 2008, p. 80).

Ambroise Tardieu will therefore draw the heads of the inmates, in a series of etchings published in 1838, but in the notes accompanying those images Esquirol does not fail to project the relationship between psychiatry and physiognomy into the future, pledging to publish a personal reflection on the topic (pp. 179-180). A truly challenging theme: this was confirmed in 1820 by another student of Esquirol and Pinel, Etienne-Jean Georget, for whom "describing the physiognomy of the alienated is difficult. They must be observed – he writes – to preserve their image" (Georget, 1820, p. 133). His exhortation will therefore find an immediate correspondence in the series of the ten *monomanes*, painted for him by Théodore Géricault, but it will be Georget himself, who had been resolved to keep the images, to lose the five portraits that have been lost. To retain every necessary, conclusive but still impenetrable grimace of the insane, we will have to wait for the arrival in the mental hospitals of photographic technology, a tool really capable of capturing more reality than that observed and to entrust to a still implicit observer the task of completing the artwork.

A task that more properly resembles a destiny, because psychiatrists have few doubts about the fact that one day the images will agree with them. In this regard, in his splendid book on hysteria, Georges Didi-Huberman attributed to photography the function of “anticipating knowledge by seeing”. Because the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, curated by Désiré-Magloire Bourneville and Paul Regnard under the direction of Charcot (1876-1880), served first of all to prove that the theorem of the great hysterical attack, with all the apparatus of presses, hypnosis, toxic substances, dramaturgy and electrostatic baths that made it true, one day it would be scientifically proved more definitive than the scientists themselves, at the time, were able to prove. The demonstration was there, under the eyes of all, at the surface of the photographic image, in the anterior future of the *responses* that the neurological body was already providing the observer. And it is precisely this deferral that transforms the fate of the inmates, in reality, into a hellish page in the history of art. A decisive contribution to the realization of this programme was provided by Paul Richer, professor of artistic anatomy at the *École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts*. His is an important role not only as coordinator of the *Nouvelle Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (starting from 1888), but because he will be, together with Charcot, the one who will be the author of the analyses responsible for documenting the emergence of hysteria in all the “monuments of the past” who, for lack of means, had not fixed it to the figurative canon of the possession. It is the programme already glimpsed in Voisin’s reference to the portraits of Kant and Newton, the so-called retrospective medicine which now dates back to the mosaics of the fifth century, while behind the “possessed in the grip of convulsions for which the doctor could not see any remedy and which the priest or the judge took possession of [...], here is a patient whose every behaviour, every nuance of her physiognomy, is captured by the pencil, the brush and photography, thus assisting the pen that cannot describe all the external effects of this strange and cruel disease” (Charcot and Richer, 1887, p. XII).

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In the meantime, following the enormous editorial success achieved by Henri Lasserre with *Notre-Dame de Lourdes* (1869

and in the context of the first pilgrimage of the sick at the sanctuary (1873), it was the entire staff of the Salpêtrière that mobilized against the re-insurgence and the positivist scandal of the sacred. Gilles de la Tourette will deal with a case of nymphomaniac hysteria set within the walls of an Ursuline convent in 1632 (this is the case of Sister Giovanna degli Angeli), while Bourneville himself will direct the famous series “Bibliothèque diabolique” for which Paul Regnard, in 1887, will publish a, in many ways exceptional, text, which seems to anticipate some of the themes to which Gustave Le Bon and Gabriel Tarde will soon give a more systematic form. According to the author, the story of the eighteenth-century witches or *Convulsionnaires* should be understood in the perspective of “social mimicry”, the same to which we must attribute “the sudden decisions that make entire populations precipitate into war, revolt or riots”. The whole nation seems sick, then, prey to “an epidemic that drives it with fury” and that confirms the existence of “madness by imitation” (Regnard, 1887, pp. X-XI).

Something similar, in order to contribute to the effort to bring pilgrimages back into the perimeter of science, would have immediately also been supported by Zola, who in the summer of 1892 went to Lourdes to gather the documentation essential for the drafting of the first of his novels dedicated to *Les Trois Villes* (Bodei, 2002, pp. 195-197). In fact, Zola writes: “Many leave feeling better then, in a *sursum corda*, a contagious hope, a kind of happy epidemic of healing, they die on their return saying that they are healed” (Zola, 2010, p. 39). The protagonist will therefore have the suspect that the crowd can force the material to obey it, so much so that the solution proposed by Zola in the notes, where in agreement with Dostoevsky, he did not fail to contemplate the “need we have to be deceived and comforted” (p. 66), remains that of creating a room dedicated to the records in which the novel, then, does not neglect to introduce photographic equipment, in order to document the conditions in which pilgrims arrive at the sanctuary before being miraculously healed. Among other things, Zola’s stay will have the indisputable merit of involving Charcot himself in the debate, who again in 1892, “was inspired by the recent trip of a famous writer to a religious sanctuary and from the discussions that have arisen

from it", he is invited to deal with the topic of *faith-healing* on the pages of the "New Review". But at this point the diagnosis of hysteria will have compromised also the good name of St. Francis and St. Teresa, also because the implementation of the healings has "the same characteristics in every age, under every latitude, for pagans and Christians as well as for Muslims" (Charcot, 1897, pp. 10-14). And to whoever reproaches him for always and only speaking of hysteria, Charcot points out, one can only answer with the words of Molière: "I say the same thing because it is always the same thing" (p. 22). A *thing* which however will continue to entertain with the social mandate of images and their "anticipating knowledge by seeing" a constitutive relationship, since despite all evidence "we must know how to wait – concludes Charcot – always continuing to search" (p. 38).

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In the meantime, therefore, the hysterics will continue to do their part and amplify the plasticity of the crises, contortions, obscene poses and ravings foreseen by specialist literature, stimulated by the threat that for those most reluctant to appear seductive and to reassure the poetics of the director, who wanted them all sick with desire and simulation, would come the order to move to the department of the incurable. And yet, on those wet plate collodion or silver bromide collodion plates, which required infinite exposure times and which nevertheless gave the illusion of finally making Esquirol's dream come true, the bodies and faces of hysterical women ended up showing much more than the figurative organization prepared by the staff of the Salpêtrière wished to show. Theirs remained a blatantly scenic presence, in fact, which would have made equally blatant the weakness of the theorems to which they provided paroxysmal and artificial evidence. In short, those images still lacked something, something probably impossible such as the unconditional surrender of forms to the flows of intent and power that invest them, in the visual perspective of a final cause, to pretend to obtain answers where they only produce effects with a strategy that is not entirely alternative – after all – to the impostures of psychics.

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Form, Gender and Class

It seems that the exorcism of metamorphosis connotes Gustave Le Bon's analyses on the psychology of crowds, because the "crowds are everywhere distinguished by feminine characteristics, but Latin crowds are the most feminine of all", given that "the fundamental characteristics of the race" always intervene to determine their mutability (Le Bon, 2002, p. 13) always intervene to determine their mutability. As we will see in the last chapter, these are the connections to which Otto Weininger will adhere in the raving plot of *Sex and Character*, but Émile Zola had already led a first and decisive investigation into the relationship between the element of the crowd and the construction of the genre, with the eleventh novel dedicated to the story of the Rougon-Macquarts: *Au bonheur des dames*.

To open the dossier of the novel is an article published in "Le Figaro" on 23 March 1881: two weeks have passed in Paris since the fire that completely destroyed the *Magasins du Printemps*, where an employee responsible for turning on the lamps at night suddenly

set fire to the embroidery department. The author of the article believes that the accident should represent a good opportunity to start reflecting on one of the greatest economic phenomena of the time (Wolff, 2009, p. 736). The starting idea is that the creation of these “bazaars” may have introduced into the moral sphere a new order of turmoil still unknown at the time of the *Comédie humaine* and that it is precisely these passions that degenerate into what doctors promptly called “department store theft mania”. With this article by Albert Wolff, in other words, the figure of the female thief immediately enters the scene, to whom the first drafts of the novel will assign a decisive role. Because “the good woman who steals because of temptation” will have to represent the “high point” of the story, a point not better specified but still programmatic (Zola, 2009, p. 80).

In general, writes Wolff, some symptoms appear on the faces of the ladies who come out of the bazaars (dilated pupils, bags under the eyes) that make listeners think of a long Berlioz symphony. Because, evidently, the merchandise begins to put on a show with a great variety of “notes” and “colours” that Wolff only ironically associates with the more traditional dimension of the aesthetic experience. The previous year, on the contrary, Zola described the specular tendency of the old *Salons* to take on the increasingly explicit form of an emporium or a department store of painting, but Wolff’s irony seems to just ignore him, just as it must ignore that already during the Restoration and the July Monarchy the *magasin de nouveautés* had borrowed their names from theatrical successes (*Au Pygmalion, Au Diable Boiteux, Au Masque de Fer, Au Pauvre Diable*) and the signs of the new shops had transformed the public street into an open-air museum, as Balzac noted (Demory, 2009, p. 24). The hotbed of the “new form of neurosis” will therefore be restricted to the women of the general public, because those of higher extraction have everything they need not to be seduced by such a trivial spectacle. Only female thieves who often actually belong to the well-to-do class, adds Wolff, can be an exception to this rule, however for this very reason they can be considered sick. His thesis is explicitly supported by the theories of Henri Legrand du Saulle, the psychiatrist who had been studying the phenomenon

of thefts in police prefectures for many years and who, moreover, since 1879 had become chief physician of the epileptic ward of the Salpêtrière. Where, to begin with, he believed that the term with which it is usual to indicate the theft of goods in shops, *vol aux étalages*, should be replaced with a more appropriate and literal expression, that of *vol dans les grands magasins*, since a crowd of criminals, indigents, perverse children, weak-minded, paralysed and senile demented has historically specialized in generic shoplifting, and it is therefore wrong to confuse them with the new psychiatric and juridical subject (Legrand du Saulle, 1883, p. 436). Which intimately has to do with the opening of department stores, a specific place in which

women of all standing, attracted to these elegant environments by the natural instinct of their sex, fascinated by such an imprudent provocation, dazzled by the profusion of lace and trinkets, are surprised by a sudden, unintended, almost beastlike excitement: they lay a furtive, although clumsy, hand on one of the items on display and suddenly they erase their most commendable past, they turn themselves into thieves, become delinquents (p. 437).

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It is precisely this cancellation and this transformation that allow medical discourse to enter the sphere of juridical competence, indicating in the nature of women (*l'instinct naturel à leur sexe*) a new "principle of coordination" of the senseless action (Foucault, 2003, p. 132). Which seems to refer in the first instance to the seductive power of fabrics, laces, trinkets and more generally of the goods exposed "to the greed of the eyes", but which is rather traced back to the impact of these factors on the presumed disposition to passiveness of the female temperament (as seducible, excitable and fickle). Thus, once he has dealt with the "professional women adventurers who live in concubinage with the scammers" and who must be held responsible for their actions (Legrand du Saulle, 1883, p. 438), the origin of most of the thefts ends up in the field of hysteria. The research that Legrand du Saulle did between 1868 and 1881 – the same research to which Albert Wolff appeals in the article that opens the dossier of *Au Bonheur des Dames*

– allowed him to establish that on a sample of 105 *pathological or semi-pathological* women who steal, it is possible to conduct the following classification:

Very feeble-minded women	4
Alienated hysterics	9
Hemiplegic demented	2
Demented with general paralysis	5
Senile demented	5
Hysterics aged 15 to 42 during the menstrual period	35
Hysterics from 15 to 42 years outside of the menstrual period	6
Hereditary predisposed women (with hysteriform manifestations)	24
Menopausal women or women who are severely debilitated following the loss of the uterus	10
Pregnant women	5

Often, explains Legrand du Saulle, “they are girls or women of high extraction who belong to an honest environment, who live in comfort or possess riches”, or that when questioned they answer: “I don’t know why I’ve done it, it is incomprehensible. I don’t lack anything, I don’t need that item and I have the money to pay for it” (p. 441). Therefore, the theft is of medical competence, but the psychiatrist uses it to support a great gender and class policy: on the one side we have the thefts still bound to a need that, by motivating the crime, makes it prosecutable (the so-called *vols délictueux*), while on the other we find the unmotivated gesture, *sans motifs et sans besoin*, in other words unpunishable. In certifying it, however, Legrand du Saulle does not neglect to objectify the emergency of hysteria (74 out of 105 thieves suffer from it) and to conceal the activity exercised by commodities in the statistical value that his analyzes attribute to the *physiologically* female origins of the senseless act (menstruation, menopause, pregnancy and hereditary predisposition to any form of hysteria, for a total of 74 cases: p. 450). This is what journalists and scientists think when the director of the department store conceived by Zola begins to believe that the real responsibility for the thefts has to be traced back to the

pressure exerted by the commercial initiative (*le résultat aigu de la tension exercée par les grands magasins*: Zola, 2014, p. 266).

And it is precisely to obtain this charm of beautiful but useless things, as he defines it, that the new cathedrals will use some strategies borrowed from the magasin de nouveautés but inserting them in a much broader and more articulated programme. In this regard, Siegfried Kracauer underlines how in the aftermath of the revolutionary fright, the urban mass had matured a real terror of events, seeking comfort in the nebulosity and in the evocative power of the name of Napoleon III, who would have had “the strange luck to come across a society that was in search of phantasmagoria” (Kracauer, 1994, p. 114). Many of the forms inherited or introduced by the department store give the impression of referring to the effort to deliver commodities totally deprived of consistency to the sight, touch and smell of customers (Verheyde, 2012, pp. 16-20). The consistency is, if anything, monetary (with the fixed price), mimetic (with the scenic arrangement of the commodities), reflected (with catalogues and mail order, which began to circulate in 1867), temporary (with the possibility of returning goods) and subjective (with the abolition of haggling). “But why are you so worried about not straining the eyes? – asks Zola’s director to his collaborators – Come on, try instead to blind them”. Thus, while commodities no longer appear to be commodities, in the era in which “the economy defamiliarised the mind from the evaluation of real quantities” (Kracauer, 1994, p. 187), the new properties that the department store associates with the products that customers still have the comfort of feeling (or observing on the printed page) they create a fundamental indifference between the individual genres and models of products, rendering understandable, to some extent, the behaviour of the female thief, who is surprised during a search, with a loot of six hundred of all the same ties (Wolff, 2009, p. 758). Because she can be absolved by the same “vertigo in delirium” that Charles Baudelaire spoke of in the poem entitled *L’Examen de Minuit* where he accused himself of having drunk without thirst and eaten without hunger (*nous avons bu sans soif et mangé sans faim*), blatantly resonating with the theft *sans motifs et sans besoin*.

And yet, if we give credit to the words of the poet and playwright Jean Richepin, in the last weeks of 1881 it is precisely French literature that has accumulated an unforgivable delay in understanding the new phenomena. Paris has changed, in fact, but reality is obscured by the persistence of a great artistic invention, that of the nasal and insidious voice of the salesman who at the time of Louis Philippe asked customers: "Do you need anything else, madam?" (*Et avec ça, médème*). A character to be completely redone, because Balzac's old salesman has been replaced by the paradigmatic figure of the *calicot*, the young man who "voluntarily enlisted in the great army of the modern shop and speculation, where one can achieve all the ranks corresponding to one's industriousness, intelligence and audacity" (Richepin in Zola, 2009, p. 742). The *calicot* began by selling two pennies of string, later became a foreman and now finds himself "a partner in these huge companies that have the importance and budget of a ministry". Sometimes they are still the children of shopkeepers, but to the complaints of their fathers and the nostalgia for small business, they oppose the certainty that there is nothing to recriminate: "Isn't it logical and right that the majority of consumers take advantage of this transformation?". In short, the *calicot* would be those who "took the side of the rail road against the horse-drawn carriage, of the association against the solitary effort, of the interest of all against the interest of someone", but to finally give a soul to the department store, argues Richepin, the intervention of someone who is able to create "the novel of modern commerce" is not necessary (p. 743). And that is precisely the novel that Zola intends to write, a "poem of modern activity" that places at the centre of the action, the clash between small business and department stores, "these veritable steam engines" that Richepin had compared in a similar way to the railway.

But just as the newspapers denounced the lack of interest of literature towards the *calicot*, in 1888 it was a writer who complained about the lack of attention that the press was giving to the "national scourge" of department stores. The author of the investigation believes that the new *maisons d'accaparement* constitute a growing danger, "that they not only corrupt the family, commerce, industry, the well-being of the vast majority of the French, [but also

compromise] the morality and reputation of industry to violently affect the national budget” (Weill, 1891, pp. 3-4). In 1892, to mobilize against these tendencies and the law that favoured them, the trade union league intervened to defend of the interests of work, industry and commerce, with a speech delivered in front of the chambers by a certain Pierson, who compared the effects of the department store to an hypnotic state. Because, what do these places do if not multiply the temptations in front of the eyes of the customers influenced by suggestion, who eventually confuse water with champagne? Thus, the alleged saving of time that the visitor would achieve by staying inside the same establishment without having to move from one shop to another, is largely nullified “by the hours lost to moving among the crowd, to taking into account all the departments, to filling one’s eyes with obsessive images, to letting oneself be hypnotized by the variety of the performance and finally succumbing to the temptation to buy things [...] one has no need for”. This is why department stores have gained the primacy of thefts, because “the seduction that is released from the conjunction of all these temptations is too intoxicating” and “weak consciousness cannot resist it” (Pierson, 1892, pp. 11-13).

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Except for the fact that, to a certain degree, everyone embezzles in Zola’s novel. Customers steal time from staff, store clerks steal their salary from the department store, and the department store steals business from small stores. “The clerks and above all the cashiers also steal”, Zola had already noted on a reconnaissance mission at the Grands Magasins du Louvre (Zola, 2009, p. 135), but nevertheless it would be precisely the female instinct (“the weak consciousness” of Pierson) to establish a privileged relationship with the propensity to theft. Zola himself, in another note, would seem to confirm the diagnosis: “Meanness among women – he writes. – One steals the other’s shift, saying that the customer has come for information. She steals a client from her. She prevents her from selling, gossiping about her, spying” (p. 177). And to reiterate this would be Pierre Giffard in a book of 1882 that Zola probably had time to consult (Cnockaert, 2007, p. 30). The *feminine eternity*, he writes, manifests itself not only in theft but also in the “theft of returned commodities”, because out of a thousand customers

there would be at least two hundred ("but the figure increases every day") who return to the store within forty-eight hours demanding to be reimbursed, even when the commodities have already been used (Giffard, 1882, p. 240). Even when the shop assistants, rummaging in the pockets of the clothes that the ladies assure they have not worn, bring to light an archaeology of lies made of bread, withered roses, pieces of cheese. After all, adds Giffard, out of a hundred ladies who behave like this and return the commodities they did not hesitate to use, perhaps sewing the protective labels with a different thread from the original one, sixty insolently claim to know the director (pp. 243-244). But from this point of view it is downright useless to accumulate accusations: that of returns is "a pawnshop in reverse" because women have no qualms when it comes to surprising the world: they pay, they display themselves and then they return after thirty-six hours to get their money back. Here is the real "crux of the matter [...], it is the woman who wants to appear, the flirt, the frivolous, the seductive, the charming - in a nutshell: the woman" (p. 247). So, after the customer spent an entire afternoon "handling fabrics, chatting about news, choosing fabric scraps, in one word, rejoicing of all her nerves and her little brain in the unnerving atmosphere of the galleries", the department store satisfies her.

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With a smile on his face - writes Giffard - the cashier makes a two-line invoice with half the sum. Then he collects the other half and when the delivery man delivers all the purchases at home, the wife will make her husband get the wrong end of the stick, as they say, showing him how cheap everything was, how the department store must inevitably lose money and how it was necessary, in order not to miss these incredible deals, to buy all those knick-knacks for the modest sum shown on the invoice, which the husband will be kind enough to pay. She hugs him lovingly and he pays, the poor idiot, without even doubting that the other half of the amount was withdrawn without his knowledge from the same bank account or from the pockets of a friend by his scrounging wife (pp. 252-253).

Criminal initiative remains a female prerogative, because the distinction between justice and injustice is a distinction “which her nature [*son état*] unconsciously leads her to ignore” (p. 300). If it were not that the “pawnshop in reverse”, in Zola’s novel, will turn out to be “a masterpiece of Jesuit seduction” (Zola, 2014, p. 246). On the other hand, Georg Simmel will also argue that it is coquetry that can imply an intimately furtive relationship with the established order, but on the basis of an assessment that is very different from that which animates Giffard’s positivism. Simmel’s woman is not *naturally* coquette, but the genesis and internal dialectic of a specific social form produce the causes that expose her to temptations. Coquetry is manifested, for example, with “a side-long glance with the head half-turned” that it would be wrong to confuse with a simple desire for pleasure, because to act in this “hint of aversion” is the very possibility of “a momentary focusing of attention on the other person, who in the same moment is symbolically rebuffed”, that is to say an expression of freedom. In the moment in which the glance is granted, in fact, “the withdrawal of the glance is already prefigured as something unavoidable in the glance itself. It has the charm of secrecy and furtiveness that cannot persist, and for this reason consent and refusal are inseparably combined in it” (Simmel, 1984, pp. 134-135). But this alternative is also a social factor, even in Zola’s novel, where the returned commodities and thefts represent the costs that the department store seems willing to incur, in the perspective of creating value for the shareholder. This is clarified by Octave Mouret himself in the chapter in which he must convince a large investor (and partner of *Crédit Immobilier*) to support his projects. The idea of arranging a meeting between the merchant and the banker is not Zola’s, but of a former salesman of the department store *Au Pouvre Diable* named Alfred Chauchard who starting from 1855, on the lands of the *Compagnie Immobilière* of the Pereire brothers, he began to build the empire of the *Grands Magasins du Louvre*, in rue de Rivoli. Zola writes:

And, above the facts already given, right at the summit, appeared the exploitation of woman. Everything depended on that, the capital incessantly renewed, the system of

piling up goods, the cheapness which attracts, the marking in plain figures which tranquillizes. It was for woman that all the establishments were struggling in wild competition, it was woman that they were continually catching in the snare of their bargains, after bewildering her with their displays. They had awakened new desires in her flesh: they were an immense temptation, before which she succumbed fatally, yielding at first to reasonable purchases of useful articles for the household, then tempted by their coquetry, then devoured. In increasing their business tenfold, in popularizing luxury, they became a terrible spending agency, ravaging the households, working up the fashionable folly of the hour, always dearer. And if woman reigned in their shops like a queen, cajoled, flattered, overwhelmed with attentions, she was an amorous one, on whom her subjects traffic, and who pays with a drop of her blood each fresh caprice. Through the very gracefulness of his gallantry, Mouret thus allowed to appear the brutality of a few, selling woman by the pound: He raised a temple to her, had her covered with incense by a legion of shopmen, created the rite of a new religion, thinking of nothing but her, continually seeking to imagine more powerful seductions; and, behind her back, when he had emptied her purse and shattered her nerves, he was full of the secret scorn of a man to whom a woman had just been stupid enough to yield herself (Zola, 2014, pp. 79-80).

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It is not the predisposition or the feminine eternity that determines what happens between the departments of the department store, it is not the "old story of the woman who never has enough money", as Pierre Giffard wrote, but the deployment of a specific strategy based on the continuous investment of capital and the spectacular accumulation of commodities. The observations in the field already spoke clearly: "The theft carried out in these conditions - Zola had noted - is the work of women who have been strongly tempted; it is you who tempt them, you act with such violence on the desire of their coquetry, thereby they steal. In the end, the responsibility is yours" (Zola, 2009, p. 135).

Thus, to the arrangement of the products that in the novel will take on the changing form of a stormy sea, of promontories or of waterfalls, will correspond “a compact wave of heads” that flow “like an overflowing river into the middle of the hall” (Zola, 2014, p. 114), creating an immediate correspondence between the crowd of the department store and the equally feminine one of Le Bon. Because it will be Mouret himself who will execute the programme that Zola sketched out in the notebooks:

Did you want to see all the customers crowded in the same spot? – he will ask Bourdoncle. – I had a really good idea! I would never have forgiven myself... Don't you understand that in this way I would have contained the crowd? A lady came in, went straight to where she needed to go, moved from petticoats to dresses, from dresses to cloaks, and then walked out without getting lost even for a moment! (p. 247).

Then he explains what benefits creating such chaos will bring to the business:

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Firstly, this continual circulation of customers disperses them all over the shop, multiplies them, and makes them lose their heads; secondly, as they must be conducted from one end of the establishment to the other, if they want, for instance, a lining after having bought a dress, these journeys in every direction triple the size of the house in their eyes; thirdly, they are forced to traverse departments where they would never have set foot otherwise, temptations present themselves on their passage, and they succumb (p. 248).

Octave Mouret's arrangements pursue the establishment of a more subtle order and produce a sort of indirect but transparent ethopoeia of the character who inhabits this places, namely the crowd of customers (Hamon, 1992). This is the perspective in which it might be interesting to take a leap forward to verify what happens when Julien Duvivier puts his signature on the film adaptation of *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1930): almost fifty years have passed from the publication of the novel and more than sixty from the beginning of the construction works that from 1869 had involved the

expansion of the department stores *Au Bon Marché* in Paris. Yet, the elements of urban history that had intrigued Zola seem to be contemporary with the production and the corresponding historical transposition of the film. After all, it would not have been long until Louis Aragon's *paysan* (1926) and Siegfried Kracauer's reference to the influence that the models developed in the mid-nineteenth century would continue to exercise in the following century, would come across the same "civil war" between old commerce and large-scale distribution, so much so that we would have to consider 1852 a truly decisive year. With the beginning of the Second Empire, in fact, the first real estate credit institutions were founded, the Senate approved the decree on the expropriations made necessary by the projects of the prefect Haussmann and Aristide Boucicaut became a partner in the haberdashery that soon revolutionized the first department store of history. It is precisely within the Cartesian system defined by these simple coordinates that the tragedy of the Baudu, the small traders of Zola and Duvivier, takes place. But the first impression is that the film director pushes the representation of progress into a much more critical perspective, resorting to a series of formal expedients such as the decomposition, superimposition or repetition of images that cancel any distance between reality and the hallucinatory state. Except that the film itself seems to accredit a moralistic and comforting conception of commodities that was totally absent in Zola. In this sense, Zola had entrusted his protagonist with the role of the clerk: Denise showed the new designs, unrolled and rewound the fabrics, listened to the requests of customers and ran between the various departments to satisfy them, while now she merely plays the part of the living mannequin. In the film, therefore, on the one hand we are witnessing a commodification of bodies, but on the other, a specular push is produced that transfers the sensuality of the commodities described by Zola onto the movements of the actresses. Furthermore, Zola's department store, where desire circulated freely from one floor to another and was exasperated by the overall dislocation of the products, is replaced by a crowd that in the film is dispersed in a discontinuous sequence of dressing rooms, hallways and studios that assign to the incursions of the spectator-voyeur the task of restoring a more traditional eroticism. This same shift then finds a coherent solution with a notable comparative impact in the film's

finale. The director of Duvivier enters Baudu's small shop to communicate to Denise that he will abandon the management of the department store: "I am a finished man – the captions make him say – I have created only pain and ruins". And here is Denise staring in a conversion that the novel could not grant her, running to the aid of Mouret armed with understanding ("You have followed progress, it alone is responsible") while in her gaze a cruel intention appears, probably motivated by the same cynicism that now leads her to add: "Be proud, continue your work". Thus, the film implicitly assures the same presumption of innocence to the commodities that it denies the shopclerk, resolving the historical contradiction with the most well-tested of moral solutions: *Cherchez la femme!*

In conclusion, one could come to suspect that from the point of view of historical and social analysis, the true protagonist of the novel is the thief. This alone would be enough to grasp the distance that separates it from the film adaptation, where the theft remains in the background, irrelevant, without ever resonating with the love story between Octave and Denise. Having to summarize it, where the novel entrusts the thief with the task of stirring Octave's conscience, who had never had any illusions about his own morality, the film resorts to the murderous fury of the old trader. The diegetic consistency of the thief, in this way, allows Zola to elaborate a much more articulated psychological representation of the director, with which it is not only death and the turn of events that make the spectacle of commodities more equivocal, but the paradoxes of desire. A desire excited by the department store which for this very reason will have to answer for it, because the thief returns a mirror image of the commodities that Zola plans in a conscious way from the very first notes, when he still simply notes how things could go and writes: "I could take from Octave's mistress the woman of high extraction who steals because of temptation, the culminating point" (Zola, 2009, p. 80). Then some time later he adds that the same character will have to lead the story to the "culminating point of temptation: all pale, she ends up stealing, which no one notices" (p. 240). And finally, the real investiture takes place with the planning of a second theft, "like the sharpest note of the temptation, of the madness of the new trade" (p. 352), which in order

to have a greater impact on the plot will have to entail a revision. Now the thief will stop playing the role of the woman who cannot afford to shop, to steal instead “with pockets full of money”, just “as one loves for the pleasure of loving, goaded on by desire, urged on by the species of kleptomania that her unsatisfied luxurious tastes had developed in her formerly at sight of the enormous and brutal temptation of the department stores” (Zola, 2014, p. 440).

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Form, Gender, Class and Race

The relationship of images with the forms of exploitation of the migrant labour force in the Italian countryside often tends to polarize on two models that bring to mind an older tradition. On the one hand the worker is represented with his back bent and his forehead on the ground, while he picks tomatoes or pours them into bins, on the other hand he disappears in the barracks, where the images make us think of a form of life so anachronistic (without toilets, drinking water, heating) that it makes the most immediate return to modernity desirable, perhaps through an eviction order. Thus, swerving violently between the subject in chains and the individual capable of surviving in the same way animals do, the farmhand continues to inherit his public and media representation from colonial propaganda, where the only two roles that were reserved for the native were those of the slave or the brute (Righettoni, pp. 14-15). Pleonastic roles, as well as equally passive, since even the brute remains a slave to the laws of nature. But from this point of

view it could be interesting to compare the iconography of race to a specific historical and iconographic context of the determinants of gender, the asylum, where the undoubtedly passive ending of subjection to shackles or passions has sometimes represented a *chance* of liberation, assuming a form that we could define as deponent.

Outside of metaphor, a truly emblematic case of the ambivalent relationship that images establish with the constitution of the subject, is provided by the story of Jane Avril, patient of Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière in Paris and later star of the Folies Bergère, because it appears as though one of the most famous figures of hysteria, the *arc of a circle*, transmigrates in the famous poses in which Maurice Biais and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec portray the diva. But the adaptation of the body to the image need not be crowned with such an international success: in the figurative organization of the asylum (Didi-Huberman, 2003) the arch represents both the reason for the internment and the coherence of a diagnosis, the symptom and the form in which the patient can become curable. Perhaps it is in this sense that we can interpret the words of some very learned men, as Frantz Fanon defines them, according to whom the colonized is a hysteric (Fanon, 2004, p. 19).

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In fact, something similar could happen on the ship that is deporting Kunta Kinte to Maryland, when the slave traders called *toubob* improvise on the bridge a music session and mock by dancing the movements of the Africans in chains.

Then they and the other armed toubob gestured for the men in chains to jump in the same manner. But when the chained men continued to stand as if petrified, the toubobs' grins became scowls, and they began laying about with whips. "Jump!" shouted the oldest woman suddenly, in Mandinka. She was of about the rains of Kunta's mother Binta. Bounding out, she began jumping herself. "Jump!" she cried shrilly again, glaring at the girls and children, and they jumped as she did. "Jump to kill toubob!" she shrieked, her quick eyes flashing at the naked men, her arms and hands darting in the movements of the warrior's dance. And then,

as her meaning sank home, one after another shackled pair of men began a weak, stumbling hopping up and down, their chains clanking against the deck. With his head down, Kunta saw the welter of hopping feet and legs, feeling his own legs rubbery under him as his breath came in gasps. Then the singing of the woman was joined by the girls. It was a happy sound, but the words they sang told how these horrible toubob had taken every woman into the dark corners of the canoe each night and used them like dogs. "Toubob fa!" (Kill toubob) they shrieked with smiles and laughter. The naked, jumping men joined in: "Toubob fa!" Even the toubob were grinning now, some of them clapping their hands with pleasure. (Haley, 2007, p. 212).

The same need to camouflage conflict in adapting to the deponent forms of surrender, was referred to in the lesson that a former slave had to impart to his son on his deathbed. His words are reported in the first lines of *Invisible Man*, the novel by Ralph Ellison, who will then return to comment on them in the epilogue. The former slave is the grandfather of the narrator, who for these very words will judge him guilty of everything:

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Son, after I'm gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swollen you till they vomit or bust wide open (Ellison, 1995, p. 18).

Living with your head in the lion's mouth is the paradoxical prolongation of war by other means, just like politics: yessirs, meekness or even that peculiar form of consent to the slave system that is declined in *uncle tomism*, thus appear in a totally new light. A more literal and bloody variation of the same strategy, could even be recognized in the practice of fiction (*taqīya*, *ketmān*) which in the dogmas of Shi'ism must characterize the behaviour of

those who are engaged in the war against unfaithful. Regarding the nineteen 9/11 attackers and some passages of the “spiritual guide” that was later found in the luggage of Muhammad Atta, Hans G. Kippenberg wrote:

In the super powered world of Western civilization, the true faithful must remain unknown. [...] In the twentieth century the character of this duty has changed. Representatives of shī'a politics such as Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran or Ayatollah Fadlallah in Lebanon relaxed their absolute duty and made the practice of fiction depend on the situation of the battle for the Islamic order. Therefore they approached the more strategic Sunni conceptions about the legitimacy of concealment and fiction (Kippenberg, 2007, p. 88).

Wanting to establish an exclusively formal comparison with Malcolm X's terms, then, it is no longer clear what the *house negro* is doing now with its devotion to the house, if indeed he no longer has anything to do with the grudges that make the *field negro* fearsome. Two years before Ellison, in 1945, in relation to the play of light and the strategic resources of the stereotype, Suzanne Césaire wrote: “If my Antilles are so beautiful, it means that the great game of hide and seek has succeeded” (Césaire, 2009).

But the mimetic enterprise of Martinique is not so far from the vicissitudes of those who today try to cross the border, as testified by the story of a young Iranian named Nusrat, who once left Tehran makes the journey that separates Turkey from the Greek island of Hios on a rubber dinghy. There he discovers that just twelve hours later he will have the opportunity to board a tourist ship bound for Patras, but despite having bought the ticket he remains an illegal immigrant, and as such the risk of being arrested shakes him to the point of preventing him from walking without constantly crashing into parked cars. Then, when he reaches the dock despite everything, an image is there to rescue him: “I had seen it done in the movies – recalls Nusrat. – I wanted to make sure no one suspected me. I saw an old lady standing in line. I took her luggage and helped her load it” (Yaghimaian, 2005). His testimony is similar to that of another Iranian, Amir, who is inspired by the scenes of

Midnight Express to evade airport controls on his departure for the Netherlands (Khosravi, 2019, p. 117).

These are examples that risk smuggling *an image of the image* that is excessively optional, however, as if the migrant could really use his own nudity to disguise it from time to time with the most appropriate costume for the search of salvation. On the contrary, it is precisely through the stereotype that the border regime positions the subject within the gender and class hierarchies, that is, in social reality, reserving a constitutive function for the military connotations of the relationship between migration and images. From this point of view, the war evoked by the former slave on his deathbed represents the common substratum not only to the opposing logics of border protection or humanitarian protection, a device that was introduced in Italy a few months before the no less “humanitarians” bombings of NATO in Serbia, but also with reference to the self-representations of the migrants themselves. Thus, those who return permanently to the village from the country of immigration will be the “veterans”, while those who only spend their holidays there become a “soldier on leave” (Sayad, 2002, p. 26). No longer an invader, nor necessarily a refugee, in fact, the migrant still considers himself a fighter, albeit in hand-to-hand combat with his own destiny (Turco, 2018, p. 207). But can such a *hand-to-hand* really take place? Is it really possible to isolate the subjective image of the fighter from the scenarios in which the conflict is determined? And to what extent should the success of the fight not coincide with the success of the invasion or the asylum request, that is, with the implementation of a migratory project inevitably mortgaged by the spectacle of the border (Cuttitta, 2012)?

It is in this sense that Fanon spoke of a *third-person consciousness*, understood as incorporation of all the images that the iconography of race has sedimented and continues to sediment throughout history: “cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects, slave-ships” and above all exoticism, interpreted in this series by the character of an advertisement for a famous brand of powdered chocolate (Fanon, 2008, pp. 84-85). The figurative canon is handed down by a third person, precisely, because “the Negro is unaware of it as long as his existence is limited to his own environment; but

the first encounter with a white man oppresses him with the whole weight of his blackness” (p. 116). The subjective image thus manifests itself in the contact with other bodies and other postures, in relation to certain historical relationships, of domination and production, including of race: “Below the corporeal schema I had sketched a historico-racial schema”, conclude Fanon (p. 84).

The direct testimony of this schema and of the links that can exist between proprioception, the history of images and lived experience, will be provided by the Iranian writer and anthropologist Shahram Khosravi.

I had just moved to Stockholm, where I had started taking courses in Social Anthropology at Stockholm University. On that October night, I left the sports hall on the university campus at 10 pm. It was dark and cold. I headed to my room in the student residence, a few hundred metres away from the sports hall. There was a piece of woodland to the right of the footpath, part of a larger national park on the northern part of the campus. There was no-one else around. No more than 100 metres away from the sports hall I heard a sound, something like rustling leaves, coming from inside the woodland. I looked in that direction but could see nothing. The moment I turned back, I was hit in the face. I heard nothing, but felt something like a big stone being smashed on my head. After a while, I found myself thrown on the ground, half unconscious, my body lying on the freezing asphalt and my face in a little pool of blood. I was afraid that more attacks would come, so I tried to protect my head with my arms. I heard some people standing around me. [...] They looked at me but did not touch me, abandoning me in my blood. When I had been shot and was lying in my blood, an image appeared in my head of a young black man on his knees, surrounded by several white men with baseball bats in their hands. The image was probably from a movie I had just seen, *Mississippi Burning* (Khosravi, 2010, pp. 78-83).

The dynamics of the accident will become clear only several days later, but in the meantime the injured body has already made it the

object of an *implicit knowledge*, as Fanon defines it. Khosravi writes: "I was still in hospital when another non-European immigrant was shot in Stockholm, and soon after him, another one and then one more. It soon turned out to be a case of a serial murderer who targeted immigrants" (p. 80). If in the case of Nusrat and Amir the film scene has favoured the self-determination of the fighter (who manages to set sail from Hios or reach the Netherlands), Khosravi's story can only confirm the latency of a historical-racial schema for which gestures, postures and events would already be preformed and therefore known, albeit implicitly. And just as Fanon's scheme established a triangular relationship ("to the triple person") between the gaze of the white man, the stereotypes of race and the weight of melanin, the predictive success of the scene evoked by Khosravi returns the evidence of an encounter (the one with his aggressor) mediated by a repertoire of equally canonical images:

I did not take the bullet personally for the simple reason that I had been shot for the same reason the young black man had been killed in that Mississippi town in the 1960s. It was the same reason that sent millions of Jews to the death chambers, that triggered the Tutsi massacre in Rwanda in 1994, the killing of thousands of Bosnians in 1995 in the Srebrenica region, or the hundreds of Palestinian minors in Gaza in January 2009 (pp. 83-84).

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The aggression that can be substantiated by the images of *Mississippi Bridge* is therefore impersonal, highlighting how the iconography of race not only mortgages the representation of the indigenous, the slave or the foreign labourer, but the same overall picture, even informing the aggressor's gestures and the relationship that the "white man" maintains with his own body. In the course of his investigation into the illegal hiring in the province of Foggia, Alessandro Leogrande was able to observe a phenomenon that perfectly illustrates the results of the intercorporeality connected to the "work camp", where the Polish labourers tended to show the same faces photographed by Walker Evans in the years of the Great American Depression (Leogrande, 2016, pp. 96-97). During the trial, Leogrande had in fact noted how even the body of illegal job broker

and overseers was no longer able to escape the proxemics of slavery, establishing a very close relationship between repetition and the coercive power of images:

I thought that that jailer pose, as a controller of human life, long reiterated, long lived, in the end one cannot but introject it, absorb it, make it become the foundation of one's being in the world. It cannot help but dig into you, modify the features of your face. Looking at the men in the cage I saw that pose, not at all mitigated by prison. And I saw the same look of contempt and superiority, as if they were waiting for nothing else than for the lawyers, the prison guards, the prosecutors, the judge, the carabinieri, to suddenly get up, as one, move the tables and chairs, loosen their ties and start picking tomatoes, artichokes, potatoes there on the floor... doubled over by exhaustion (p. 183).

In the becoming-body of images, therefore, we can also grasp the success of a disciplinary programme, which already for Marx consisted precisely in making natural what was not before. Moreover, in an intersectional perspective such as the one we are exploring, alongside the determinants of gender and race, the relationship between images and the field of work will necessarily have to imply further consideration for the dimension of social class. Leogrande's observation, in this sense, is supported by an anecdote that Furio Jesi relates in the chapter of *Spartakus* entitled to the symbols of power, where we are dealing with such a surprising adherence between the body and the image (as in the case of illegal job brokers) that it makes the second more true than the first.

Recently, and from personal experience: in devising a union propaganda sign, consisting of the figure of the master who oppresses the figures of the workers from above, the use of a drawing by Grosz (a quintessential fat "master") with the superimposed photograph of the face of a master known to all has proved more effective, rather than the whole – albeit suggestive – photograph of the same master caught in a "royal" pose at his table. In fact, Grosz's drawing gives

a symbolic dimension to the propaganda image, and the superimposed face determines the coincidence between symbol and everyday experience (Jesi, 2013, p. 51).

Because the knot still to be untied remains that of the relationship between image and experience. This seems to be the most appropriate measure to understand the inversion of colonial aesthetics in the great game of hide and seek, of the *taubob* choreography in the liberating dance of the slaves, of the war on invasion in the fight for life and of the subjection on the path to escape. In fact, the reiterated image smuggles the hierarchies of class, gender and race into the state of nature, but incurring the paradox of imposing a discipline that seems to be fulfilled and to be successful only in the construction of the subjects for whom the image was reserving a position of domain: the illegal job brokers and overseers, the “master” and his “royal” posture. To try to introduce and understand the reasons for this paradox, then, it is first necessary to refer to a letter from 1971 in which Furio Jesi will offer to the publisher Ubaldini his monograph on Walter Benjamin’s thought. Two years earlier, in fact, in the typescript of *Spartakus*, Benjamin’s name does not even appear, but it is really difficult not to compare the central definition of the book, that of revolt understood as the “point of intersection between the eternal recurrence and once and for all” (p. 69), to the messianic openness that characterizes the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. Yet Benjamin had approached the theme of the eternal recurrence in a perspective entirely consistent with the terms in which Jesi himself elaborates his interpretation of Spartacism, which, as we shall see, will have to arrive at a categorization analogous if not exactly superimposable to that which opposes memory to involuntary memory. Without venturing into conjectures, however, I intend to limit myself to pointing out this consistency with the reference to a paragraph of *Central Park* in which Benjamin provides a definition of the eternal recurrence that enters directly in resonance with the problem of the image and its repetition, as well as with Jesi’s analyses. Benjamin writes:

The idea of eternal recurrence derived its luster from the fact that it was no longer possible, in all circumstances, to expect a recurrence of conditions across any interval of time shorter than that provided by eternity. The recurrence of quotidian constellations became gradually less frequent and there could arise, in consequence, the obscure presentiment that henceforth one must rest content with cosmic constellations. Habit, in short, made ready to surrender some of its prerogatives (Benjamin, 2006, p. 167).

Just as the compulsion to repeat must ward off the dark presentiment of reality and death, it does not seem wrong to assume that the repetition of images can serve to mask the weakening of the hierarchical structures that the iconographic tradition has promoted and reiterated. But of those same images it will be possible to have very different, even opposite, experiences and uses, based on the positioning of the subjects within the hierarchies that the image claimed to eternalize, attributing them to nature. Living with your head in the lion's mouth, therefore, means being aware of the historical and spectral character of this reduction to the state of nature, amplifying its deception to accelerate the process of decomposition, so that the lion ends up in the same trap it had set up to prevent the dark presentiment of one's own insecurity: the denial of experience. But it is not necessary to suspect that Jesi has concealed the presence of Benjamin in the palimpsest of *Spartakus*, because from this point of view the description of what happens to the lion (or to the taubob, to the illegal job brokers, to the white man, to psychiatric knowledge or to the "master", through a movement adhering to Hegel's master-slave dialectic) is entrusted in the text to an equally pertinent quote from Lukács, who wrote: "A bourgeois profession as a form of life signifies, in the first place, the primacy of ethics in life: life dominated by something that recurs systematically and regularly, something that happens again and again in obedience to a law, something that must be done without concern for desire or pleasure" (Lukács, 2010, p. 75). Quote that Jesi renders even more enlightening for our theme, when he explains: "Within bourgeois society – is his paraphrase – the law of eternal recurrence determines the mode of crystallization

of ideological formulas, at least in the eye of who observes them” (Jesi, 2013, p. 4).

Of the image, therefore, the eye of the subject that the image is favouring (but sometimes also that of the subordinates – and this is the limit of the revolt, according to *Spartakus*) does not grasp the demonic or spectral dimension, preparing to identify it with reality and thus ending up suffocating the experience in a comfortable dependence to the functioning of certain automatisms. But precisely in relation to race, one would say, the recoil of the image on the distribution of the parts in reference to the identitarian strategy of the observer and the mimetic strategy of who is observed, has nothing accidental, indeed. The temptation would rather be that of making it a paradigmatic case of the so-called *burden of the white man*, that is, of the processes through which the forms of life forbidden from the historical and always current transition to capitalism are projected into the new anthropological function assigned to the black man, forcing him to symbolize everything that the European workforce has never stopped wanting and that only racism, now, finally allows it to attack (Jordan, 1974). Such a desire could also be expressed in the nostalgia for the Renaissance cosmos and its metamorphoses, assigning to them the detrimental connotations of bestiality or enslavement to the despotism of nature.

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Leading us to one of the most emblematic sites of this assignment is a testimony by Stefan Zweig, who recalls how at the time of his early adolescence more metamorphoses were taking place in the world than had been produced in the last two centuries. Indeed, the period is that between the gestation of the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the arrest of Captain Dreyfus and the debut of the *cinématographe*, the testing of the radio and the invention of mammoplasty, the isolation of the plague and the dream of Irma, the patient who would have shown Freud the path of psychoanalysis. Meanwhile, in Paris, the newborn psychology of crowds did not neglect to associate the behaviour of the mass with the female temperament, but even with their disruption these first signs of rupture should not have disturbed the aesthetic formation of young Viennese. To the crisis of traditional values, instead, to the bodies that conspired under

frock coats and whalebones, to Isadora Duncan's bare feet and to the spectacle of the *chambres séparées* reserved for the increasingly scandalous dinners of the polite bourgeoisie, Zweig's circle would have opposed a restraint quite comparable to that of those who polish silverware under aerial bombardments. A year older than them, the only patron of the Café Central who did not have to derogate from the passion for the present, despite having suffered it in a controversial way, to say the least, was Otto Weininger, who attributed to the fickleness of the times two partially interchangeable names: that of woman and that of Jew. Because the Jew and the woman constantly change shape, he argues in his dissertation, adapting to the environment with a predisposition to chameleonism that opposes them to the values perpetuated by the male character. Of course, even the genius can change indefinitely, but in his case the transformation is made legitimate by the interior mastery of all possible forms, which therefore do not alter the integrity of the subject authorized to utilize them. While he confesses that he cannot renounce the principle of continuity, in short, the only metamorphosis that Weininger seems to save from the passiveness of the woman or the parasitism of the Jew, is borrowed from the meaning that the term assumed in Leibniz's monadology, where everything that happens must correspond to the unfolding of an interiority that has already implied it. For the rest, only abstinence holds true, the only way in which a man can force a woman to take leave of the changing circumstances of coitus. Not for nothing, in the same months in which he was working on his dissertation, Weininger completed the enthusiastic study of Peer Gynt, the story of the child-hero on whom Ibsen had not failed to impose the multiple metaphorical features of the pig, the donkey, the reindeer, the wolf, the goat, the bear, the lamb, the bull, the owl, the mouse, the louse, the hawk, the rooster and the cuckoo, but always in the name of a life strictly *en garçon*, without letting him be possessed by that "defiant denial of reality" that in *Sex and Character* coincides with love (Weininger, 2005, p. 279). And to the objection that in a world populated exclusively by *Peer Gynt* epigones, our species would quickly become extinct, Weininger would have responded with the utmost contempt for anyone "who cannot image the Earth without having men on it scratching about".

Nietzsche had already argued that man was antiquated, but only to advocate going beyond him in a direction clearly indicated by the need to live beyond good and evil, like the flowering tree. On the contrary, in the notebook he writes during his last travels before committing suicide at the age of twenty-three, Weininger extends the hatred of mutations to representatives of the animal world and plants, identifying them with vulgarity and disease. Because in him, the censor of metamorphosis who confessed to feeling horror at all that in Goethe has too much in common with Ovid, every judgment shows the scars of the most desperate aversion to the natural ground of existence (Lessing, 2021). Thus, in *Sex and Character*, we could really witness the violent clarification of the relationship between the construction of gender and race and the *burden* of the individual subjected to “a new intellectual system whose fundamental assumption was the separation between human beings and the rest of nature”, according to Moore’s definition.

Not for nothing, it is precisely an extraordinary mutability to characterize the protagonist of the first Italian comic strip set in the colonies, *Bilbolbul*, created by Attilio Mussino in 1908 and published on the “Corriere dei Piccoli” until 1933. In fact, at the heart of his adventures lies the principle “that his forms, like those of other characters and parts of his world, constantly change” (Stefanelli, 2019). Unlike Weininger’s genius, however, Bilbolbul is not in the least able to dominate his own metamorphosis, which on the contrary he undergoes: if he sprouts wings on his feet or turns into a donkey it is only because the narrator has used metaphors to which its metamorphoses give a literal meaning. Due to his delay with respect to the figurative and more advanced use of language, Bilbolbul can immediately remind of the page of *Allegories of Reading* in which Paul De Man tells:

asked by his wife whether he wants to have his bowling shoes laced over or laced under, Archie Bunker answers with a question: “What’s the difference?” Being a reader of sublime simplicity, his wife replies by patiently explaining the difference between lacing over and lacing under, whatever this may be, but provokes only ire. “What’s the difference” did not ask for difference but means instead “I don’t give

a damn what the difference is." [...] Archie Bunker, who is a great believer in the authority of origins (as long, of course, as they are the right origins) muddles along in a world where literal and figurative meanings get in each other's way, though not without discomforts (De Man, 1979, p. 9).

Even Bilbolbul's misadventures can be traced back to the tension between Mrs. Bunker's "sublime simplicity" and the trust "in the authority of origins (as long, of course, as they are the right origins)". The woman and the little savage remain at the mercy of words, while Archie Bunker trusts in the authority that binds them to an intention. The colonized, in other words, does not control figuration, whereas the Italian reader cannot realistically suspect that the *right origins* of the expression "put wings on your feet" are not referring to image of an exceptionally fast run. The mutability corresponds to a defect, in any case, that only the recognition and true identity of an expression can correct. In Lukács' terms, then, we are again dealing with the principle that "life itself is dominated by everything that recurs according to a system and a rule". On the contrary, adds Jesi, recognizing the still ideological character of the crystallized forms means giving back to images the possibility of adhering to life, as "modules of knowledge and experience". It should therefore not come as a surprise the ones to grasp this possibility in reference to the iconography of race are the slave and the migrant, who are subject to a gaze that appeases or deludes itself to appease through images the "dark presentiment" of their own instability, their own burden. Because what "the memory preserves or rediscovers – writes Jesi – is only sediment", even within the images, of which it is quite important to qualify the becoming-body, the becoming "part of the living organism like a digested food", generating the presence of what they conceal and the removal of what they show. For example, Jesi adds, "if in a bygone time a face inspired authentic love or authentic hate (or respect or contempt), the remembering of the lineaments of that face may remain or return with clarity and precision in memory but it will be past – in the sense of a dead, imprisoning past – while the genuine experience of love or hate will not be remembered; only its circumstances and semblance will be, and it will endure, alive". But if the memory of that face is still so

beautiful and decisive, Suzanne Césaire could say, if the iconography of race still blinds the gaze we adopt to observe the life of the new slaves in the countryside and at the back of the barracks, then it means that the great game of hide and seek continues.

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