

The birth of digital populism

CROWD, POWER AND POSTDEMOCRACY
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY



Edited by *Obsolete Capitalism*. With interviews to Jussi Parikka, Saul Newman, Tony D. Sampson, Simon Choat, Alberto Toscano, Lapo Berti, Luciana Parisi, Tiziana Terranova, Paolo Godani.

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February 2013.

*The birth of
digital populism*

The explosion of digital populism

The atmosphere of Torre di Venere remains unpleasant in the memory. From the first moment the air of the place made us uneasy, we felt irritable, on edge; then at the end came the shocking business of Cipolla, that dreadful being who seemed to incorporate, in so fateful and so humanly impressive a way, all the peculiar evilness of the situation as a whole.

*Thomas Mann*¹



Fascism was not nurtured from a previously elaborated doctrine: it arose from a need for action and it was action; it was not a party but, in its first two years, an anti-party and a movement.

*Benito Mussolini*²



Otanes recommended that the management of public affairs should be entrusted to the whole nation. ‘To me,’ he said, ‘it seems advisable that we should no longer have a single man to rule over us – the rule of one is neither good nor pleasant. You cannot have forgotten to what lengths Cambyses went in his haughty tyranny, and the haughtiness of the Magi you have yourselves experienced. How indeed is it possible that monarchy should be a well-adjusted thing when it allows a man to do as he likes without being answerable? Such license is enough to stir strange and unwonted thoughts in the heart of the worthiest of men. Give a person this power, and straightway his manifold good things puff him up with pride, while envy is so natural to human kind that it cannot but arise in him. But pride and envy together include all wickedness; both leading on to deeds of savage violence. True it is that kings, possessing as they do all that heart can desire, ought to be void of envy, but the contrary is seen in their conduct towards the citizens. They are jealous of the most virtuous among their subjects, and wish their death; while they take delight in the meanest and basest, being ever ready to listen to the tales of slanderers. A king, besides, is beyond all other men inconsistent with himself. Pay him court in moderation, and he is angry because you do not show him more profound respect – show him profound respect, and he is offended

again, because (as he says) you fawn on him. But the worst of all is, that he sets aside the laws of the land, puts men to death without trial, and subjects women to violence. The rule of the many, on the other hand, has, in the first place, the fairest of names, to wit, isonomy; and further it is free from all those outrages which a king is wont to commit. There, places are given by lot, the magistrate is answerable for what he does, and measures rest with the commonalty. I vote, therefore, that we do away with monarchy, and raise the people to power. For the people are all in all.'

*Herodotus*³



On 24th and 25th February 2013, the general elections for the XVII legislation of the Italian Republic were held in Italy. The election result was defined by most political observers as an earthquake of unprecedented dimensions. For the first time in the history of the West⁴ a newly born political association, the *Five Star Movement* (5SM), which define itself to be an anti-party, ran in a parliamentary electoral competition and won it by a narrow margin; it became the first party in the Italian Chamber of Deputies⁵ with 25.5% of the votes. Despite the fact that the total amount of votes – including those from Italians living abroad – assigned the first place to the center-left coalition, its leading *Democratic Party* received only 150,000 votes more than the 5SM. As a consequence, the Italian electoral system conferred a substantial ‘majority premium’ to the *Democratic Party*. Regardless of this action, the infant movement led by Beppe Grillo affirmed itself firmly enough to deeply subvert the Italian political panorama. It is suitable, if not even obvious, to define Grillo’s anti-party as a new form of digital Populism. To understand this one only need look at the sharp innovation of the devices used by politics, which has been introduced by the Five Star Movement, such as the extended and innovative use of communication channels provided by the Internet. This has been combined with both the brutal simplification of the political message, in order to attract political consensus, and the dissipation of all acquired forms of institutional-systemic ratio. It is clear that following the unsettling result of Italy’s general election in February 2013, a new time has violently knocked on the door of Italian society, and it is now interrogating real problems with unusual and fast-paced questions.

The beginning of a Big Data Era in the Western political scenario

1 Thomas Mann, *Mario and the magician* (1930). The original novel was published in Berlin as *Mario und der Zauberer*.

2 Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, XXXIV

3 *The History of Herodotus*, translated by George Rawlinson (1866)

4 Pierluigi Bersani, during a public conversation held with the journalist Andrea Covotta at the Festa Democratica of Villalunga, organised in Reggio Emilia on August 5, 2013.

5 For a correct reading of the electoral results of February 2013 see the *Wikipedia* entry.

6 The original essay, written for the London Review of Books, was published on the Wu Ming Foundation website.

7 It goes without saying that Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904) did not analyse the fascist phenomenon throughout his life, having died in 1904. However his opinions and thoughts on social somnambulism and its general micro-sociological imposition was happily used by philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980) for an innovative and explosive analysis of micro-fascism.

The early analyses of the explosion of the 5SM phenomenon appeared in February 2013 and were not satisfying. The vehement accusations of populism directed to Grillo's anti-party by the center-left and left-wing intelligentsia above all, seemed to only partially grasp the historic success of the 5SM; they hastily linked it to the crystal clear fragility of the political and institutional landscape and to the incessant work of deconstruction of the Italian society, which has been operated by Berlusconi's vast authoritarian mediascape. The first innovative, engaged and somehow controversial analysis of the phenomenon was published shortly after the election result, on March 8 2013, by the writers' collective called *Wu Ming*. It was entitled Grillismo: Yet another Right-Wing Cult coming from Italy.⁶ We used the reading of this anti-5SM pamphlet as a basis for a major non-linear investigation looking at diverse authors, including Antonio Gramsci, Mario Tronti, Gabriel Tarde,⁷ Wilhelm Reich, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Fèlix Guattari among others. These thinkers had already examined the systematic penetration of fascism, irrational mass behaviour, collective hypnosis, national identity and capitalism, combining them with the similarly dense and controversial notions of people, crisis, organization, societies of control and data science.

However, in our opinion, even the best post-electoral analyses of the 5SM left a margin or a void, something that encouraged us to undertake a supplementary investigation; we felt the need for a revelatory study, one which could disclose aspects of the rising phenomenon of digital populism and of the

future post-democratic system that seemed to appear on the horizon of the Big Data era. A disturbing question emerged among us: if an unlikely techno-couple of Italian *cool operators* caused such a big electoral tsunami, how would the champions of the Society of the Query, such as Google, and other social giants, such as Facebook and Twitter, actually affect democracy, were they to run for Western elections? Are we, perhaps, at the beginning of a huge political shift in the way the masses are governed and, ultimately, of representative democracy as we know it? Populism, in both its analogue and digital version, is a firmly European phenomenon with an extremely seductive English variation, namely the UK Independence Party, a party which is as dangerous as other anti-establishment right-wing organisations can be.

Therefore we have posed to Italian and English-speaking intellectuals – of varied political backgrounds and disciplinary skills – six questions⁸ which concern the foundations of digital populism and the relations existing between masses, power and post-democracy at the dawn of the 21st century. What you will read is the result of conversations with Tiziana Terranova, Luciana Parisi, Lapo Berti, Simon Choat, Paolo Godani, Jussi Parikka, Saul Newman, Tony D. Sampson and Alberto Toscano.



The Analogue populism of Beppe Grillo

⁸ Written in March 2013, the six questions differ in three points, when addressed to Italian and English-speaking thinkers. More specifically, the Italian questions are **1** on micro-fascism; **2** on the crisis; **3** on the organization; **4** on tidal waves; **5** on the missing people; **6** on corporate control. The English ones are **1** on micro-fascism; **2** on the crisis; **3** on the missing people; **4** on corporate control; **5** on the googlization of politics and the financial side of digital populism; **6** on affective capitalism.

The two sides of the five-starred cosmology: analogue & digital populism

9 Another duumvirate which shocked because of how it was done and managed, involved the figures of the resigned Pope (Benedict XVI) Joseph Ratzinger, and the newly-elected (Francis I) Jorge Mario Bergoglio on March 13, 2013. An unusual, albeit short, diarchy.

10 To expand, see the seventh plateaux 'Year Zero: faciality' of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaux*.

As it is generally known, the five-starred cosmos features an interesting dual axis core: Beppe Grillo and Gianroberto Casaleggio. The couple is de facto a novelty in the crowded, bon-vivant world of Italian politics. A duumvirate is in itself a relevant fact in the context of political organisation and leadership.⁹ Furthermore the division of fields of intervention between the two 5SM leaders is equally worthy of note: Grillo is the cowboy interfacing between the physical world of electors and the digital one of data wizardry; Casaleggio is the architect of the mining, processing and storage of the huge mass of data, which are collected by the same computation means that are governing the World Wide Web. The traditional side of populism, which can be identified with the former comedian Beppe Grillo, will be defined as *analogue populism*; while the murkier side which has been conceived and organized by Gianroberto Casaleggio according to the functioning of networked cultures, will be defined as *digital populism*. Here lies the novelty of this movement: such digital populism does not align, if not loosely, with the political discourse of the various European *Piratenpartei*, in other words the newborn parties that convey idealised views on *net* cultures and practices.

The 5SM exploits the Internet and its experiences in order to gain power and overcome the Italian society for its own authoritarian ends. Their mixture of analogue and digital populism is truly effective and incisive. Gianroberto Casaleggio has had, since the very foundation of the movement, a strategic flair. He realised that the increased theoretical and scientific ability of the digital world is ineffective unless it is corroborated and supported by the more dynamic and functional impact of the analogue populism on everyday reality. In other words, the computational world needs the *faciality*¹⁰ of the capture apparatus of analogue populism, since the latter provides the switch that directs and organizes the input of raw metadata, channels it and subsequently outputs it into the physical world. Grillo's face is therefore the

screen through which the algorithm becomes part of the tangible world.¹¹ The 5SM may be seen as a political device, that is INPUT: CASALEGGIO ~~~~~ OUTPUT: GRILLO.

The new prestidigitator: a travelling virtuoso & entertainer

Who is Grillo? Giuseppe Piero Grillo – an accountant born in Genoa sixty-six years ago (1948) – is the irritable and cranky genius behind the 5SM ‘non-party’. After his success in the general elections of February 2013, Beppe Grillo is the new prestidigitator of Italian politics and society. In the novel *Mario und der Zauberer*, published in 1930 by Thomas Mann, the figure of the magician Zauberer blatantly anticipates the traits of Grillo himself. Someone hides behind the rascal figure of the magician: it is ‘Cipolla...’, ‘a virtuoso traveller, an entertainer, an illusionist.’ Although the short book presents a clear allegory of the histrionic figure of Benito Mussolini,¹² the spectacular avatar of Cipolla sums up the characteristic features of the mass hypnotist in the Era of Consensus. The salient features of the magician Zauberer can be found, in fact, in Benito Mussolini, Silvio Berlusconi and Beppe Grillo¹³ – yet only the latter embodies them at the purest level.¹⁴ Let us briefly dwell upon two key aspects of the text by Mann.

11 Reading Deleuze and Guattari philosophical analysis in the *Anti-Oedipus*, one finds that the ‘surplus value of code [occurs] when the machine picks up a code snippet from another machine’s code’. Digital populism, in its current heterogeneous form, includes code snippets from twentieth century forms of populism, such as faciality and spectacle, in the Debordian sense of the term.

12 *Mario und der Zauberer* was written in Germany in 1929. The text, based on a family holiday Mann took in Italy in 1926 was published, in Italy, only in 1945 given its indirect attack to fascism.

13 The seriality of the spectacular politics of Mussolini, Berlusconi and Grillo, is a Mediterranean variation of the broader Western political seriality of Reagan, Schwarzenegger and Berlusconi. There even is a comic sub-series, somehow narrower and more imitative: Coluche, Grillo, Russell Brand.

14 For a witty reading of the 5SM political summit of February 2013 in Rome, see the documentary *What is Left?* made by Luca Raggi and Gustav Hofer.

The eternal charlatan

15 Thomas Mann, *Mario and the Magician*

16 Niccolò Machiavelli, *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, Volume 2, p. 751.

17 A fictional character from Edmund Spenser's 1590 poem *The Faerie Queene*. Braggadocio is known for his boastfulness and arrogance. Such theatrical figure inspired the braggadocio type of rapping, used by MCs in Hip Hop battles all over the world.

18 V. Hugo, *Notre dame de Paris*. Quasimodo, the infamous hunchback, is crowned *Pope of Fools* by the Parisiennes during the fête du fous on January 6 1482.

19 G. Lukács, 'Realism in the Balance' in *Aesthetics and Politics* (1977).

Perhaps more than anywhere else the 18th century is still alive in Italy, and with it the charlatan and mountebank type so characteristic of the period. Only there, at any rate, does one still encounter really well-preserved specimens. Cipolla had in his whole appearance much of the historic type; his very clothes helped to conjure up the traditional figure with its blatantly, fantastically foppish air.¹⁵

The first aspect we are to enquire upon briefly is the historical context in which Thomas Mann places the pictorial cliché of Cipolla. The stage magician of the Era of Consensus is nothing else but the direct descendant of the popular phenomenon of the charlatan, whose clever-talker attitude had already been described by Niccolò Machiavelli:

At last a certain quack doctor – for many such can every day be seen here – promised his father to make him well. And since those who promise benefit are always believed...¹⁶

Poorly-deployed pretentiousness and the virtuosity typical of an upside-down carnival were spotted by both Alberto Toscano – who saw in Grillo the deeds of the infamous Braggadocio¹⁷ – and Saul Newman, who paralleled the lively spectacle of the raucous clown from Genova to that of the *Pope of Fools*, namely Victor Hugo's repugnant Quasimodo.¹⁸

p. 31 ↗
p. 9 ↖

Mass psychopathology and fascist lyricism

The socio-cultural context in which the magician's actions occur is the second aspect to be examined. György Lukács¹⁹ has

correctly emphasized the novelty of the powerful scenery that was outlined by Thomas Mann in *Mario and the magician*; in the book mass psychology intertwines with fierce charisma, hypnotic suggestions and an electric social atmosphere that is polluted by nationalist mythologies. The piercing power of the magician Cipolla evokes those affective powers of grotesque and uncontrollable behaviours, which can provoke animal-like reactions, as well as hysterical subjugation of the masses.²⁰ The specificity of Mann's depiction of the 1920's Italian landscape is more successful in highlighting the collective psychological dynamics of allegiance and akrasia than in describing the historical-

military characteristics of fascism, such as the 'deterrent action' of militant squads and *Fasci* of combat. Nor did Mann describe – in an environment that was already lyrically fascist – the economic, reactionary and classist coming together of the agrarian, capitalist and bourgeois classes against the *revolutionary multitude* of Gramscian doctrine. At the end Cipolla forces a mesmerized audience to perform a delirious and obscene dance, showing how the compulsive and disturbed conduct of this epicurean crowd emerges from a wish to impose and deprive; a wish that acts through hypnosis, imitation and a playful-grotesque entertainment.

20 A. Gramsci, *Sul Fascismo*. At the height of the political and ideological struggle against Mussolini, Gramsci did not hesitate to define him as 'new monster, epileptic (*Sovversivismo reazionario*, p. 116), buffoon, clown, folkloristic figure, medieval mercenary' (*Tra realtà e arbitrio*, p. 135). 'Howler monkey' was more prosaically addressed to Tommaso Filippo Marinetti (*Cavour e Marinetti*, p. 46), while Gabriele D'Annunzio became 'a servant of Anglo-French masonry' (*L'unità nazionale*, p. 63).

21 Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. See, the plateau '1933: Micropolitics and Segmentarity'.

Microsociology: the ballistic contagion and widespread catatonias

'In homage to Gabriel Tarde (1843–1904)' opens the chapter on Tarde's microsociology in Deleuze and Guattari's 1933: *Micropolitics and Segmentarity*, a reference text for this very collection of writings and interviews. Gabriel Tarde is an avant-garde French sociologist who in the late 19th century suggested a bold sociological theory that was based on micro-relationships and on the contagious power of those everyday influences that occur at infra-social levels. Tarde's emphasis is upon individual acts and imitation as a 'phenomenon of contagion of belief

22 *Ibid.*

23 See issue 7 of the French journal *Multitudes*, December 2001, who features a monograph dedicated to Tarde *intempestif*, with articles from René Schérer, Eric Alliez, Jean-Clet Martin, Jean Philippe Antoine, Isaac Joseph, Maurizio Lazzarato. The complete works of Gabriel Tarde was republished under the scientific direction of the philosopher Eric Alliez, with the title *Oeuvres de Gabriel Tarde (Vol. I/Vol. IV, 1999-2003)* for the publisher Les empêcheurs de penser en rond.

and desire,' otherwise defined as 'non-logical nor teleological phenomenon of transmission of two intimate forces.'²¹ Therefore, the obedience of crowds – seen as a perpetual process – no longer takes place on large *macro* segments, such as classes, but rather on 'infinitely delicate' cerebral sub-levels. According to Tarde, sociology must sink 'its roots in the heart of the most intimate and dark psychology and physiology. Society is imitation and imitation is a kind of sleepwalking.' At the dawn of mass society, Brownshirts and Blackshirts understood and successfully exploited this reading of society on a

molecular level. Authoritarian mass-parties enacted the occupation of every social dark corner as a daily practice – as Deleuze-Guattari rightly describe in their chapter on micro-fascism, which is inspired by the sociological analysis of Gabriel Tarde:

Rural fascism and city or neighborhood fascism, youth fascism and war veteran's fascism... Fascism of the couple, family, school and office. Only the micro-fascism can answer the global question: why does desire long for its repression? How can it desire its very own repression?²²

From primitive fragmentation to impulsive and uncontrolled excitement

The desires of the masses can unquestionably be *progressive* – better living conditions, a natural tendency to an infinite progress of society, a ratio enlightened by social choices and practices – and, at the same time, *regressive* – social involution, atrocious divisions between rigid segments, growing hatred and resentment ready to implode with great violence. The delay in considering Gabriel Tarde's microsociological analysis has been partially recovered by the Deleuzian philosophical thought in *Difference and Repetition* (1969) first, and in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) later. However, an in-depth analysis of Tarde's thought appeared only at the beginning of the 21st century amongst the most long sighted Deleuzian circles in Paris. Alliez and Lazzarato,²³ among others

in France, embraced the idea of curating the publication of the complete writings by Tarde, offering academic (and not only)

24 Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

seminars to study his theorizations, while critically connecting them to the current developments of the global economic-financial system. The *primitive* geometry of both the homogeneous Greek political sphere and Marxist culture – this based on the rigid fragmentation of a class society – is objectively completed and complicated by Tarde’s molecular analysis. The shift from macro to micro-analysis, although one does not exclude the other, certainly indicates a profound change in the cultural paradigm; this variation is exploited by current digital systemic forces with great imagination and determination. In short, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, ‘everything is political, but every politics is simultaneously macropolitics and micropolitics.’²⁴ Affective politics and the manipulation of impulsive and uncontrolled excitement have been savely exploited; firstly by the total right-wing of Reagan’s *universal California*, and secondly by a traditional populism that is wary of anti-establishment recriminations virally active within the *social corpus*. The current populist rhetoric is, in fact, the consequence of the exclusion of large popular *strata* from the economic and inner-mental standards which were proposed by the post-1989 neo-liberal elites.

Admiration and revenge: the magnetic power of the winner and world-historical necromancy

How is it then possible that large popular strata obey and surrender without resistance to the new domineering subjects? Gabriel Tarde explains that ‘it is not fear, I repeat, but admiration, not the strength of the victory but the sensitive splendour of superiority, its bulky presence that gives rise to sleepwalking. So it sometimes happens that the winner is magnetised by the looser.’ As a consequence, a large part of Italy’s post-classist electoral substrate – who supported Berlusconi’s dominion until the day before – is today voting other authoritarian figures with equal sleepwalking passion, because of the same superiority and secret admiration towards the defeated opponent, ‘since the dominant character of sleepwalkers is a singular mixture of anaesthesia and hyperaesthesia.’ As Tarde affirms, this phenomenon happens on

25 Umberto Eco, *Il fascismo eterno*, (1995), accessible here in Italian. The term *Ur-fascism*, also defined as Eternal fascism by Umberto Eco, is here intended as an element of permanent fascism deeply compatible in a contemporary society. We do not, however, agree with the points that Eco assigns to fascism as its salient features. We differentiate *Ur-fascism* from both macro-fascism - which is exerted by the totalitarian State and dreamt of by the Empire or the Reich, which requires racial laws and plans concentration camps - and micro-fascism - which lurks in our head, loves power, longs for success, accepts the harmful will of a transformation from thin to solid segment. For the important differentiation between macro- and micro-fascism see Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, in particular '1933. Micro-politics and segmentarity'.

26 Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'La Ricotta', fourth episode of the movie *Ro.Go.Pa.G.* (1963).

as political explosion of sleepwalking and imitation.

p.17, p.59 ↩

a micro level thanks to the ability to quickly react to populism and its animal instinct; and on a historically-dilated macro level, as it happened in the Germanic tribes after the conquest of Rome in the 5th century or after the Romans' conquest of Hellas in the 3rd century BC. This deep disturbance, this intermittent and distant fascination can be found, albeit in a curiously reversed way, in Ernst Bloch's drawing from Karl Marx's 'world-historical necromancy': while Gabriel Tarde sees admiration as a deep cause of somnambulism, Ernst Bloch considers revenge as a stimulus for renewal movements and strong agents of change. He calls it the 'original element': because of it, the French harked back to the Consular practices of the Roman Empire, the Germans of the Müntzer peasants' war looked at the deeds of the Jews of the Old Testament, and the Italian Renaissance artists and intellectuals were influenced by the Greek and Roman classics and by pagan culture. Complete revenge and hidden awe for the defeated are the incendiary ingredients of any revolutionary impatience, and yet they are still definable

From the small bourgeoisie to the post-bourgeoisie. Autonomy of the post-bourgeoisie.

Is there a socio-political constant quality of the Italian populist and fascist *rank and file* that runs throughout the 20th century and which is now looking adrift into the 21st? Antonio Gramsci believed that the matrix of *Ur-Fascism*²⁵ as a mass movement was determined by the petty bourgeoisie's desire of emancipation from both the ruling elite and the national and international establishment. According to his analysis, the socio-economic conditions which arose in the first two decades of

the 20th century encouraged the Italian bourgeoisie – wearied by the post-World War I crisis – to want to be independent from the established and constitutional powers. The Gramscian analysis resonates, like a tuning fork, with other fragments proposed by other astute observers of the Italian customs from the past century. Analysing early Fascist Italian habits in *Mario and the Magician* Thomas Mann explicitly mentions a ‘middle-class bob’. Finally, during an ironic exchange from the short film *La Ricotta*,²⁶ the director Pier Paolo Pasolini, indirectly answers the question of a journalist appearing on the stage, through the character of another director, played by Orson Welles:

‘What do you think of Italian society?’ ‘The most illiterate people, the most ignorant bourgeoisie in Europe.’

p. 43
In a crisp passage, Lapo Berti describes this trans-generational segment of Italian society, which was before stigmatized in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s movie as unfinished modernity:

The unachieved process of modernizing civilization has caused hostile reactions among the deepest layers of society, where people’s opinions are formed. This group seemed to reject modernity in all its forms, although they would naively get excited for its inventions. These people were inflamed by the fascist narrative; they embraced the deep cauldron of Demo-Christian reformism without being changed by it; then they returned to exalt the anomaly of Berlusconiism, which, once and for all, revealed its populist and undemocratic nature. They represent today, as they did yesterday, a good half of the Italian people. When active, they influenced, and still do, the destiny of the country.

27 Here a transcript of the interview with Orson Welles: ‘What do you want to express with this new work?’ ‘My intimate, deep, archaic Catholicism.’ ‘What do you think of Italian society?’ ‘The most illiterate people, the most ignorant bourgeoisie in Europe.’ ‘What do you think of death?’ ‘As a Marxist is a fact that I do not take into consideration.’

Semi-barbaric topology: cruelty and miasms from Italian society

This portion of Italian society is competitive, fertile, unnerved, violent, Catholic and hypocritical. And at the same time, it is factious and deeply individualist, permanently supporting forms of anti-statism and against political parties. This very part of Italy is seduced by hazardous political discourses, such as the latest Grillismo, which guarantees to it both a radical presence in the social field and the continuous exploitation of the post-classist and post-bourgeois situation of autonomy; it is distant from the concept of 'modernity' and of 'people' as conceived by Western political philosophy. What happened then in the last one hundred years? In the April of 1921, Gramsci already wrote in vain:

It has by now become evident that fascism can only partly be assumed to be a class phenomenon, a movement of political forces conscious of a real goal; it has overflowed, it has broken loose from every organisational framework, it is superior to the will and intention of every regional or central committee, it has become an unleashing of elemental forces which cannot be restrained within the bourgeois system of economic and political governance. Fascism is the name for the profound decomposition of Italian society which could not but accompany the profound de-composition of the state and which can today be explained only with reference to the low level of civilisation which the Italian nation has reached in sixty years of unitary administration. Fascism presented itself as the anti-party, it opened the doors to all sort of candidates, it allowed an uncompounded multitude, with its promise of impunity, to inlay vague and nebulous political ideals onto the overflowing of wild passions, hatreds, desires. Fascism has become a habitual fact, it has identified itself with the barbaric and anti-social psychology of certain strata of Italian people not yet modified by a new tradition from school, from a shared life in a well-ordered and well-administered state.

With the eruption of the populist movement one may find demagogues in every corner of Italy. The country is a fertile laboratory of creative solutions considering the massive size of its post-bourgeois formless group: 'coal sales or even racket appear when a party is closed' wrote Gramsci. The melodic landscape

of Italian populism has recently been gifted with a new rhythmic character: the Forconi (*Pitchforks Movement*).²⁸ This is composed of various social strata, including ultra-populists, tax-resisters, neo-fascists, hooligans, Mafiosi and a wide range of impoverished and unemployed people. They control the media landscape and the physical space of Italian squares. Has a new phase of the populist protest already begun with the *Forconi*? After it had been temporarily taken away by the rapid successes of the 5SM, the far-right is now claiming its considerable political space back.

Dictatorial psychopathology and collective sleepwalking

There is a clear difference between the old-media version of traditional populism – well represented by the Italian Berlusconiism – and the new five-starred analogue media populism.²⁹ In that regard, a mention to the concept of the *psychopathology of dictators*³⁰ is needed. This term indicates the atypical ability of the leader, in this case Beppe Grillo in his digital-pop version, to move its followers from a position of inferiority – due to the overpowering action of the corrupt power and the honest helpless nature of the citizen – to a position of superiority. This superiority is ensured by the double effect ability of the former comedian: on the one hand he makes use of sharp mockery techniques, which enable the audience to take down their political opponents and make fun of their most disadvantageous aspects; on the other hand, Grillo underlines the ethical and moral superiority of the *Leader Maximo* and of its followers, comparing it to the inferiority of the opponents, who are identified in an ancestral way:³¹ politicians / corrupted people, bankers / usurers, immigrants / thieves are seen as the hypothetical adversaries. While the main reasons of Berlusconi's followers' state of hypnosis were complicity, identification and a dark use of the law – this includes frequent amnesties and inefficiencies of a State certifying impunity for everyone – the 5SM hypnosis is due to the viral transmissions of a feeling of passivity and vague truths. This is the result of unique communicative abilities in a society that is in an advanced state of decomposition. Once again Cipolla's eloquence is sharp and pointed:

The capacity for self-surrender, he said, for becoming a tool, for the most unconditional and utter self-abnegation, was but the reverse side of that other power to will and to command. Commanding and obeying formed together one single principle, one indissoluble unity; he who knew how to obey knew also how to command, and conversely; the one idea was comprehended in the other, as people and leader were comprehended in one another. But that which was done, the highly exacting and exhausting performance, was in every case his, the leader's and mover's, in whom the will became obedience, the obedience will, whose person was the cradle and womb of both, and who thus suffered enormous hardship.³²

How many similarities to the fateful figure of the dux Grillo! He is obediently directing his voice through a megaphone, trying to convince a mass of people who are already-hypnotised... Grillo does not practice politics for himself; instead he laughs and fights for us. He has become the instrument³³ of a virtual will: 'I'm just amplifying the voice of the young generation.'



28 To expand on the *Forconi* see Ilvo Diamanti's article, *Tra insicurezza e benessere perduto ecco l'Italia ai tempi dei Forconi*.

29 This distinction between different dictatorial sensitivities seems to belong to the analogue rather than digital world, as the category of moral and ethical superiority entirely belongs to the leaderistic chthonic field. Grillo is here closer to Hitler than to Farage or Berlusconi. With regards to the identification between authoritarian and hypnotized leader, the sarcastic demolition of the opponent is not a digital action. New media hypnotism is similar, in this sense, to that advanced by old media. The movement's digital tracts must be sought in other areas.

30 **John Gunter**, *Inside Europe*: 'As more and more people join the leader, they merge inferiorities and become a superior-

ity (...) Germans, for instance, say that they do not fight for Hitler, but that Hitler fights for them'. To expand on the theme of infectious joy caused by unquestioned obedience see **Alan Bance**, 'The political becomes personal: Disorder and Early Sorrow and Mario and the Magician', in **Ritchie Robertson's** *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Mann*.

31 **George Lakoff**, *Do not Think of an Elephant!* To expand on bio-political infections see **Sampson's** article 'Contagion Theory Beyond the Microbe' published by ctheory.net in *Special Issue: in the Name of Security* (2011). **Sampson** uses Tarde's theory of sleepwalking, **Lakoff's** cognitive communication and **Teresa Brennan's** affective transmission.

32 **Thomas Mann**, *Mario and the magician*

33 Notice that the slogan

used to enhance the (false) anti-leaderism of a (deceptively) horizontal movement is a precise communication frame. Social sleepwalking is here in full effect: frame, obedience, control. The few awake people are the leaders and their communication and marketing experts. This anti-leaderistic framing, hiding the true 5SM chain of command, is highly persuasive: one need only read Bruce Sterling's account of his meeting with Casaleggio, published by Wired Italia in August 2013. 'The Movement has no leader because even leaders can be a burden. Instead of leaders, the Five Star Movement has Beppe Grillo, an orator who's not looking for public office, and Casaleggio, who up until a short time ago, rarely said anything to anyone.' May Sterling's imprudent consideration be attributable to the cerebral blackout occurring when two VIP cyber-gurus meet?

The Digital populism of Gianroberto Casaleggio

The golden dawn of the Net strategist

Who is Casaleggio? Gianroberto Casaleggio was born in Milan sixty years ago in 1954. He is the founding member of Casaleggio Associati SRL (2004), a marketing and communication company that handles the tech side of 5SM. He is the undisputed leader of the movement's digital world: it is possible to talk about digital populism thanks to him. Casaleggio is an expert of Network and IT-driven economy; he is an out-and-out manager of Italian dot-com companies, *Olivetti* and *Webegg* among others; he is the ambitious headhunter³⁴ of Beppe Grillo; after meeting Casaleggio in 2005, Grillo defined him as 'either a mad person or an evil genius'. Casaleggio is possibly the single Italian politician to have read carefully and diligently Marshall McLuhan and *Wired*, the geeks' bible. His ideological references are such as Nicholas Negroponte, Philip K. Dick and Chris Anderson. His business card reads *Net Strategist*. His only ambitious anthropological and political project is the disintermediation of the zoon politikon: the reduction of the intermediaries available to the political animal.

Prototypes of disintermediation at the turn of the 20th century

34 Headhunting is an active practice in international marketing consisting in the recruitment of qualified – often creative managers – but marginal people compared to the Oxbridge tradition. In this self-defined creative area, the headhunter seeks unusual and surprising talents and skills rather than traditional ones.

35 John Alderman, *Sonic Boom: Napster, MP3 and the New Pioneers of Music*.

36 Among the founders of Napster. Parker headhunted Zuckerberg and his Facebook, becoming its first President. See David Fincher's movie *The Social Network* (2010).

37 Any reference to political outsourcing is desired. The comparison between Napster and 5SM is not as hasty as it sounds, considering that MP3 are shared by means of peer network nodes; peer-to-peer follows the logic of client/server equivalence. The 5SM claims, politically, that its equal sharing of online data is all about ideas, therefore the Network's client/server equivalence is at work in this segment. P2P equals idea sharing, if the idea replaces the file and the user replaces the node. It could even be assumed that the movement's slogan 'each one is worth one' originates in the logic of P2P networks, where indeed each node counts as one, being both horizontal and equal.

In the last two decades, cybertech economy has transformed our conception of the flow of contemporary capitalism. Starting from the late nineties, entire established sectors of the 20th century's economic system have collapsed or have been totally rethought, following the continuous development of the cybertech revolutions. Among the fields that have been disintermediated there are music, publishing, finance, communication and the most classic of intermediation sectors: credit. Since the end of the past century, what used to occur over long economic cycles has begun to take place at a much faster pace; this is partly caused by revolutionary technological breakthroughs. In the case of the rise of the MP3 – the most emblematic of all cases – this change happened over a two-year period. For example, the impact of Napster on the industrial market between 1999–2001 was incredible.³⁵ Internet allowed the direct sharing among millions of people of a single musical work through peer-to-peer sharing. This rapidly erased all marketing issues, such as copyright, national and international regulations. The new standards abolished the previous ones: the sudden collapse of the music recording industry facilitated a change of the overall system economically-bound to the music world, from the label to the recording studio, the distribution, the retail trade, communication strategies, phonographic media and artists' management techniques. It is a real hi-tech revolution that has turned artificiality into reality while fostering a pirate-

sharing communication of data. Such cyber-disintermediation is detrimental to established markets and it is also at work in the 5SM: a sort of Napster platform of the 21st century politics with Beppe Grillo and, above all, Gianroberto Casaleggio as Shawn Fanning and Sean Parker.³⁶ Their aim is to provide a free social service to the political industry.³⁷

Disintermediation of the zoon politikon

To disintermediate the *political animal* – which represents the minimum unit and conscious singularity in politics – is not exactly the same as to disintermediate the single sound units in the music industry. All the democratic mechanisms that have been developed for the zoon politikon in the last 2500 years – from Cleisthenes' *Boule* to the Roman *Senate*, to the British *House of Commons* and the French *Assemblée nationale* – acted as functional, and often radical, reforms of the political representation of their subjects; thus they conformed to the social composition of their times. Those agents that act within the current representative systems – namely the political parties – are the expression of mediated territorial and social interests. Unfortunately, the general decay of Nations under the expansion of the global financial-economic machine has deprived of credibility the legislative and representative bodies, and also those organizations operating in these contexts; organised forces from other segments of society are strengthening

38 Historical neo-liberalism began with the de-regulation of the Reagan-Thatcher duumvirate at the end of the 70s. For a sharp analysis of neo-liberalism and its excesses, see **Maurizio Lazzarato**, *The Making of the Indebted Man*.

39 The emptying of political and institutional chthonic forces is matched by the proliferation of political cosmic forces such as, for example, the IMF, the G8 or 24/7/365 online financial markets, absolute actors of the system's simultaneous functioning.

40 Among the usual corollaries of a dictator are the single party, the abolition of Parliament and the suspension of individual and collective freedoms.

41 May it be a return to the origins of Athenian democracy, with particular regards to the classic theories of Cleisthenes' assembly? General elections in fact simulate, on a large-scale, the direct assembly of Athenian *Ecclesia*. Moreover, the form of control exerted by voters on the elected belongs to the Periclean golden age. Called *eûthyna*, it was the Athenians' way to review a mature democracy.

42 This is an issue of accountability and, in particular, of meaning-transfer from the field of Computer Science to that of Politics. How to determine the behaviour of a single political entity (a user, in Computer Science) within the system? To expand see B. **Manin**, A. **Przeworski** and S. C. **Stoke**, *Democracy, Accountability and Representation* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

43 George Box, *Empirical Model-Building and Response Surfaces* (John Wiley, New York, 1987)

44 As it happened to the Soviet model between 1989–91. The collapse of the Communist Party swept the entire society.

45 A nationwide judicial investigation into political corruption that led to the demise of the so-called *First Italian Republic*, resulting in the disappearance of many parties.

46 A liberal conservative, Christian political party founded by Silvio Berlusconi and Marcello Dell'Utri.

47 Although some still stubbornly consider the idea abhorrent, politics is, in the capitalist world, an industry like any other, with its own target market. The competitive entity (a party) needs marketing to package and promote the product (an electoral program) to its customers (the voters). Hence the success of marketing-oriented parties. When demand is high but supply low, marketing comes into play with new parties, as in our case. In *Negotiations*, Deleuze wrote that 'maybe speech and communication have been corrupted. They're thoroughly permeated by money - and not by accident but by their very nature' ... 'Marketing is now the instrument of social control and produces the arrogant breed who are our masters'. Originally published in 1990, these Deleuzian texts indicate a drift already outlined in the society of continuous control and instant communication, at the end of the Eighties. Forza Italia and the 5SM belong to ↩

instead. The widely addressed idea of reducing the costs of politics was born from such Western weakness. But within the economic downsizing of the political-institutional subjects, another factor is at work with its own goal: the sovereignty of the world market, which is enacted by the financial-economic machine and is achievable through the de-regulation³⁸ of economic flows and their separation from the interest of corporate nations. This factor allows for the highest level of disintermediation,³⁹ since it eliminates those intermediate administrative and representative bodies that are perceived as superfluous. If a total disintermediation has been pursued by the economic and financial capitalism for decades and has become chronic, how can digital populism contribute to it? In its authoritarian and fascist guise, traditional populism matched the criteria of disintermediation, which were imposed at the macro level by 20th century industrial capitalism: in this case the figure of the dictator directly approached his people, thus avoiding social, political and institutional mediations. In view of such simplification of the *chain of command*,⁴⁰ what new figures of power can digital populism point to at the dawn of the *Petabyte Age*? Casaleggio suggests two answers: direct e-democracy⁴¹ and network-inspired self-creating political movement.⁴²

All models are wrong: obsolete mass parties

Casaleggio's action of disintermediation addresses political parties first, which he considers as

obsolete models of representation. The modern political party traces its roots back to the 19th century and subsequently it affirmed itself within modern mass society in the 20th century. This organisational model was then shaken – especially the one of the left-wing parties – by the decline of industry and the crisis of the working class. The Internet-savvy Casaleggio has read George Box: ‘All models are wrong, but some are useful.’⁴³ But how wrong should such models be to be no longer needed? General elections are the benchmarks against which the usefulness of parties and the quality of the competing models are measured. Yet a further risk must be considered, that is the possible failure of the entire democratic system due to the collapse of these models.⁴⁴ In addition to the post-1989 crisis, Italian political parties have been affected by the crisis resulting from the long-running and endemic corruption in Italian society: in 1992 Tangentopoli⁴⁵ wiped out an entire ruling class. During these two crises, the Italian political laboratory offered *Forza Italia*⁴⁶ as a fresh party model: a marketing-oriented⁴⁷ organisation, based on a hierarchical business model that makes full use of television as a communication medium and which has little local representation. *Forza Italia*’s target audience was the same as described in the previous passages on analogue populism: the post-bourgeois formless multitude that constitutes the majority of Italian society. The downfall of Silvio Berlusconi’s party was caused not only by the high corruption charges against him and his main collaborators, but also by the advent of the Internet and the subsequent diffusion of social networks, which displaced Berlusconi’s real source of power: television. New media killed the old media. As a matter of fact, Casaleggio believes that newspapers and television belong to the past and should be regarded as niche communication tools. The successful marketing experience of *Forza Italia* became obsolete⁴⁸ in the short span of two decades. It is time for a fresh experiment:⁴⁹ today Casaleggio Associati has the same role within the 5SM as



the horizon suggested by Deleuze. Beware in fact that the business model, namely advertising, is the same for both the television and the Internet: free services in the face of ubiquitous advertising.

48 The historical left should be given credit for the *Social Democratic* party model which, albeit bruised, resists after sixteen decades of life, in its noble German version. Worse is the situation of the communist model, in agony since 1991, seven decades after 1917.

49 In politics today, the release time of new products into the market is drastically reduced: obsolete ones must be quickly retired.

50 Chris Anderson, *The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete*

51 See *The Economist*, ‘The Data Deluge’ and *Wired*, ‘The Petabyte Age’.

52 For a critic of the economic-computational Google domain, see **Matteo Pasquinelli**, 'Google's PageRank Algorithm: A Diagram of Cognitive Capitalism and the Rentier of the Common Intellect', in K. **Becker**, F. **Stalder**, *Deep Search* (London, 2009).

53 Otherwise known as *ubiquitous computing*, these are a tool of Data Science, a discipline dealing with data mining. See 'A Machine Learning View on Profiling' in M. **Hildebrandt**, K. **de Vries**, *Privacy, Due Process and the Computational Turn* (Routledge, 2013)

54 Otherwise known as *everyware*, a network of networks combining data about the user and its devices in any place and at any time. See **Greg Elmer**, *Profiling Machines. Mapping the Personal Information Economy* (MIT Press, 2004). It is a meta-dimension since the Internet is just one of the many networks that produces and captures a user's data.

55 **Evgeny Morozov** intuited that data can be considered a social currency, since personal data is replacing cash as a good to be exchanged for services. This is one of the pillars of the Internet ideology's hidden agenda. See the relevant Financial Times article from December 2013, 'The Snowden Saga Heralds a Radical Shift in Capitalism'. The danger is that the user-voter might become a data entrepreneur longing for higher profit. May it be the next VAT people generation? From self-entrepreneurs to data entrepreneurs.

Publitalia had within Berlusconi's party: it provides a new organizational model and communicative power in the digital era of the infosphere. However, times have radically changed since 1993—4 – the biennium of the development of a top down corporate party's analogue populist model. All models are wrong, and none are now useful. '*They do not have to settle for models at all*'⁵⁰ affirms Chris Anderson: data will provide a (posteriori) model, as Google shows.

Data is data. Less is not more: more is more

At the climax of avant-gardes and minimalist design, Mies van der Rohe coined the famous motto '*Less is more*'. In the age of Data Deluge,⁵¹ Chris Anderson straightforwardly states that *more is not just more*. Besides, he suggests that today the unlimited availability of data requires a new connective intelligence. Massive data interconnections ask to be thought of differently, as Google teaches us; therefore, the *more* of this era of data must be *different*.⁵² How can a future political party – such as Casaleggio's web-based organization – target its customers with accuracy if the party itself works as a business enterprise in a highly competitive market? Advanced Data Science answers this question with *smart algorithms*⁵³ that collect, store, analyse and use widely-scattered data from the web and its *meta*-dimension, which encompasses the entire social context.⁵⁴ These algorithms produce users' profiles by targeting the data users generate in a given environment. Such

comprehensive and ubiquitous control creates two different data categories of the digital world: user data and user behaviour. It is necessary to distinguish between *person* and *behaviour*. User data includes individual information necessary to thoroughly reconstruct one's identity – this can be called the *user-voter* figure; on the other hand, *user behaviour* contains information on actions carried out by the *user-voter*. A general profile and model results from the intersection of these two categories. Furthermore, the individual and group *user-voter* classification is supported by Machine Learning, a discipline that deals with computational systems, which are improved by experiential learning.

Politics as applied math

The puzzle starts to come together: every single piece of information is gathered and processed; afterwards, it is linked to a profile; a model or pattern is then generated; finally, cluster classification or homogenous grouping is performed. Unique kinds of information are extracted to contribute to a new knowledge. Unavailable to the public, this dark data is hidden from the user-voter, who unwillingly supplies it following a 'rational' economic agreement: free access to information on the Web is given in exchange of personal data.⁵⁵ Dark data can then be sold to generic advertising companies – as in the notable case of Google; alternatively, they can be distributed to governmental and non-governmental control offices, for alleged security reasons. Otherwise – as in our example – this data form the

56 Every leader, even the hidden ones of an heterarchical organization, knows the potential of collecting and managing user dark data and understands the importance of protecting or unveiling it. The management of the results of the 5SM online consultations is, for example, never transparent nor verifiable. Data is kept inaccessible intentionally, not because of it being outside the organisational scope – for excessive cost or analytical complexities.

57 Among the political categories there now permanently exists that of last-minute voters: those who decides on the election day. In Italy, they account for a large number of voters, between 8 and 10 millions, making up a quarter of the electorate. 'Unaligned voters with no traditional political affinity, they are influenced by (in)direct relationships happening at tiny space-time levels', state the analyst Ilvo **Diamanti**. This is a vast gray area where decision-making can be successfully other-directed through contagion, suggestion and mass hypnotism. In this context, Tardian micro-analysis combined with Data science and Internet ideology can generate an analytical monster able to bypass the disappointing results provided by both predictive surveys and *ex-post* analysis of electoral flows.

58 **Google Search** uses other techniques alongside *PageRank*. To expand on its mechanisms see Tom **Vanderbilt's** article in the January 2013 edition of *Wired UK*, 'The Future of Search'.

59 On the dangers of Google's political radicality and absolute power see Mathias Döpfner's letter to Eric Schmidt, Google's Executive Chairman, entitled 'Why We Fear Google', and Shoshana Zuboff's answer 'Dark Google'. Both articles were published online by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in April 2014.

60 Bruce Sterling, in the aforementioned *Wired* interview, quotes Casaleggio saying that TV does not interest him: 'it's like talking about the dinosaurs... It makes no sense to talk about the future of the dinosaurs, because they are extinct.'

61 The dimensions of which were relatively small in occasion of the April 2013 'Quirinaria': 28,518 users voted to elect the movement candidate to the role of President of the Italian Republic

basis of the *rank and file* of any political movement based on network cultures.⁵⁶ *Data is data* and the better is the *data*, the better are the *analyses*, the *results*; and, as in the case of Google, the better is the capacity and overall performance of its search algorithms' the more rewarded its users. Why does a *user-voter* choose a certain party?⁵⁷ Why does s/he feel more empathetic to certain topics rather than others? What are the *user-voter's* personal inclinations? How much and how finely can a user's profile be tailored?

The googlization of politics

What can politics learn from Google? Certainly it can absorb the neutral and uncritical relation existing among the most disparate data. Chris Anderson writes that Google won its current role of global advertising industry thanks to applied mathematics; in other words thanks to its famous *PageRank* algorithm. Google claimed neither to know the advertising industry nor to want to master it; it simply assumed that the best information – data processed with great analytical tools – would prevail in such a highly-competitive market. Google was right and it has achieved records results. It is hard to say whether a political version of *PageRank*⁵⁸ will ever be put together; until this point, Casaleggio has been the politician most interested in the Google model. He claimed neither to know the politics industry nor to want to master it; he simply assumed that the best information – data processed with great analytical tools – would prevail in such a highly-competitive market. Thanks to the successful strategies of Casaleggio's digital populism, we are now witnessing the emergence of an impressive power, one that is rapidly moving from abstract cyberspace to socio-political reality.⁵⁹ The googlization of politics is therefore part of the algorithmic regulation that controls our society. It is not a mere *political choreography*, nor a new complication of politics. Today we are, already and unconsciously, facing a reality where politics is approximated by computational techniques.

The paradise of web-marketing. Structural political movements as semantic networks

Web-marketing is a functional tool for the meeting between Google and politics. As analysed above, Casaleggio considers political parties as outdated models close to extinction, just like vinyl records, newspapers or dinosaurs. Why shall we bother with the future of dinosaurs?⁶⁰ According to Casaleggio, the future of political representation lies in *political movements*; in the cyber-manager's view, these movements are clusters of accurate voters' profiles, which can be used as beta-testers of the human condition; this process is meant exclusively for his desire to achieve political power. The 50,000 people group of *MeetUp* members and 5SM militants is called '*La Rete*': this celebratory name indicates the decision-making machine for all current and future political decisions, which is nothing else but a type of *webocracy*.⁶¹ This web-influenced choice was a consequence of the '*Parlamentarie*' – which took place sometime before the general elections of February 2013 – and it had three specific objectives: enacting a first form of electronic direct-democracy, transforming the movement,⁶³ or at least its core, into an autopoietic⁶⁴ semantic network,⁶⁵ and monitoring the cluster analyses of the semantic network, as dictated by Casaleggio's techware. This form of electronic surveillance is, in fact, determined by proprietary software that is developed, tested and managed by Casaleggio Associati; this despite the idea of a bottom-up open platform, which is often claimed to be the real 5SM model,⁶⁶ as in the best *Piratenpartei* tradition.

63 In the span of two years (2011–13), Casaleggio transformed the movement's bland branding to strong identitarianism. 5SM initially only granted brand use to local lists – generically alternative green civic lists – running for municipal or regional elections. Casaleggio aided the passage from low-key local branding to aggressive and identitarian national organisation.

64 To expand on semantic networks see Elena Esposito, 'Digital Prophecies and Web Intelligence', in M. Hildebrandt, K. de Vries, *Privacy, Due Process and the Computational Turn* (Routledge, 2013).

65 Intended as H. R. Maturana, F. J. Varela described it in their classic 1972 essay *Autopoiesis. Realization of the living*. The notion of autopoiesis as 'network of self-evolving creation and transformation processes' has been used in other contemporary disciplines of knowledge/power. An example is systems theory applied to organisations and marketing.

66 Federico Pistono demanded the use of free open-source decision-making software, such as *Liquid Feedback*, in an open letter to 5SM, published in March 2013. The liquid democracy attempts of the movement's activists are regularly stopped by Casaleggio's smart marketing.

67 **Dataveillance** is the correct term: the continuous monitoring of individuals or groups through the

analysis of data, aimed at regulating and governing behaviours. See Roger Clarke, *Information Technology and Dataveillance*.

68 The Movement is described on Grillo's blog as: a *free association of citizens. It is not a political party nor it is intended to become one in the future. No left or right ideology, but ideas. It seeks to foster an efficient and effective exchange of views and a democratic debate outside of associative and party links, without the mediation of governing or representative bodies, thus granting people that governing role normally attributed to a few.*

69 A political criticism formally plausible if addressed to analogue populism. Note that Tony Blair already claimed to be beyond left and right in the 1990s. For what concern digital populism, the hidden Internet ideology of numbers' techno-objectivity is at work behind this slogan. According to such new politicians, numbers are neutral, therefore not right nor left. Looking at social problems only from an ideological perspective is, according to these techno-evangelists, ineffective and therefore obsolete. They prefer the logic of numeric authoritarianism: 51 > 49. Reaching 51 is not a problem of the techno-evangelists, which merely record the neutral datum: the paradigm of neutrality.

70 We could talk of a *voting semantic* when discussing Google's (s)election model. Each hyperlink connecting a particular object-website counts as one. Unlike in democratic elections, where each vote only expresses its value, in the competitive world of Google a vote is semantic, acquiring a higher value if ↩

There is nothing better for a techno-evangelist working at the intersection of data science, social network and e-commerce⁶⁷ than such an experiment of political marketing: it isolates a large group of voters within a well-defined cluster, while observing and testing them in the context of their actions for a relatively long period of time. Here hides the true Data Deluge. The paradise of web-marketing.

Beyond left and right: the Internet ideology

The alleged neutrality of 5SM has already exposed them to ridicule. Someone said playfully that being 'beyond left and right' equals *qualunquismo*, political apathy, and therefore right-wing politics. What kind of politics does web-marketing produce? The controversy involving digital populism offers insightful views. The aforementioned Google approach implies that the only useful factor is correlation, since this large dataset is impossible to understand by humans. The analysis of correlation systems is not supported by pre-existing scientific hypothesis, but by the sole analytic approach to confrontation strategies: there is no reason for a datum to outmatch another. Meanings follow the correlation between data and actions. Similarly, Google Search ranks a site according to the number of its existing quality links established. As Elena Esposito rightly noticed, this type of correlative analysis contributes to a new web-geography: order is generated by disorder. In the same way as Google places an *object-website* within a hierarchical grid and

evaluates linkage data through *PageRank*, the geography of 5SM's choices is not affected by preexisting ideologies or values that were previously shared among its members and voters; instead, such choices are influenced by the objective analysis of the *dark data* available to the leaders. An example of this process was suggested by Tiziana Terranova during her interview: in the Autumn 2013, the 5SM Senators had a dispute over the events of Lampedusa.⁷¹ On the 3rd of October 2013, two 5SM Senators proposed the abrogation of the immigration crime, which had been sanctioned by the Bossi-Fini law. The majority of the Senate's *Justice Committee* voted for the abrogation. However, Casaleggio and Grillo censored this independent initiative; on the blog they stated that the movement's position on the matter could not be that one of the two 5SM Senators. For Casaleggio and Grillo with this position the 5SM would have collected an insignificant amount of votes⁷² in the previous general election of February 2013. It is likely that the *dark data* available to the leaders – and censored to the elected representatives and their electors – prompted the duo to immediately suppress the Senators' behaviour. What many considered a 5SM parliamentary success and celebration of civic pride was instead a crushing defeat for the two *duces*... No emotions, no values: 'The Movement was not born to seat some out-of-control Dr. Strangelove in Parliament!' The elected representatives of the Italian people are neither Senators, nor spokespersons for this non-party: they are avatars. Data is data. In other words, with the advent of the Big Data era the history of politics can no longer be thought of in terms of production, but rather in terms of relationship.



it comes from an important page. See P. Phifer's analysis on the topic.

71 On October 3, 2013 a ship sunk close to Lampedusa, claiming the lives of 339 people, classified as illegal immigrants. Among the raging controversies, one related to the lack of recovery work from Sicilian fishing boats. This is a very controversial point: apparently, the illegal boat was not rescued because of the perverse effects of the *Bossi-Fini* law. Doing otherwise may have resulted in the prosecution of the Sicilians which would have risked prison for aiding the illegal immigrants, as it already happened in 2007. The abolition of this 2002 law, brainchild of Gianfranco Fini and Umberto Bossi, is felt as a battle by the left.

72 Between insurance firm ads and e-book banners, a Newspeak-worthy note can be read on Grillo's blog: *The amendment of two 5SM Senators that proposed to abolish the crime of illegal immigration was voted yesterday. Their position is personal. It was not discussed with other Movement's senators, it was not part of the non-program voted by eight and a half million voters, it has not been subjected to any formal verification. We disagree on the method and the essence. Firstly because a spokesperson cannot arrogate such an important decision on such a sensitive social issue without consulting anyone. The Movement was not born to seat some controlless Dr. Strangelove in Parliament! Had we proposed the abolition of this crime before the general election, an offence against which the law stands firmly in more civil countries than ours, such as France, the UK or the US,*

The Net strategist becomes the manager of complexity

we would have obtained ridiculous percentages. To ignore public opinion, the will of the people, is common practice for those parties that want to educate the public, but not for us. The Movement and the citizens who belong to and voted for it are one entity. Regarding the essence of the amendment, it is an invitation for African immigrants to embark for Italy. They will interpret it as "immigration is no longer a crime!" Lampedusa is collapsing, Italy is about to. How many illegal immigrants can we accommodate if one every eight of us Italian does not have the money to eat? While this has been the most convoluted communicative moment of the Movement, let's not fail to mention to what extent it is pervaded by the Internet ideology, beginning with the subtle techno-objectivity of the numerical datum of electoral failure, considered certain by the techno-evangelists blogging leaders.

73 Not that they attempted to, although the emergence of Barack Obama, unexpected black swan, might have stopped an attempt from their side. Obama-love is also a successful product of the Network with which the candidate directly engaged. The United States are then still an example of 'mediated' politics. It is also likely that the lack of big Internet firms is determined by the speed factor: as long as American politics goes as fast as the Silicon Valley, there is no direct interest in the electoral competition.

If data and politics are becoming more and more alike, what relationship will data and democracy have? Digital populism answers in different ways to the impact of data on the public sphere. Digital populism draws from Network cultures to build unranked organisations, militant practices, modes of communication, aggressive marketing strategies and new theoretical models. As Bruce Sterling notes, Casaleggio is the only Network theorist to have succeeded in his first attempt to seat a remarkable number of citizens in a Western Parliament; this was achieved through democratic elections. Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg and Larry Page did not succeed,⁷³ whereas Casaleggio did. His was an undoubted success. But to reach such an incredible result, the Net strategist had to reinvent himself as a manager of complexity. The SSM, his creation and political device, had a direct impact on reality, addressing diversity and discontinuity with radical innovation. Casaleggio spent years studying network marketing, which introduced him to the guiding ideas of complexity management, such as autopoiesis, unranked organisations and evolution at the *edge of chaos*. Among his objectives were: to create an anti-party with the same characteristics of a network; to employ a disrupting agent to direct the system-network; to manage the connections, relationships and dependencies of the system-network, making them smooth to ensure a future development; to establish a new political pedagogy, which originates from the architecture of the network-

context. Casaleggio devoted himself to his experimental political laboratory between 2005 and 2013.

Political connections between local sensors & social networks

Which political device can tackle the complexity of everyday reality? A self-organized anti-party, one that follows contemporary network logics, can. Casaleggio knows that an organization, and its structure, cannot arise and flourish in the vacuum. The digital part of his organization can hardly be compared to the other political forces. To put it briefly, it is not the time yet for a total digital populism: this change must happen gradually. Online and offline activities must share the political scenario. Political representation is therefore achieved thanks to the work of local sensors, which are opposed to the typical network of local sections of the traditional parties. The SSM *MeetUp* borrows directly from Howard Dean's *grassroots* movement; a former US Democratic leader, he is an iconic figure for American progressives. In 2004, Howard Dean used *MeetUp* groups as a secret and external strategy within the Democratic Party primaries. The online platform *MeetUp.com*⁷⁴ had been created in 2002 by Scott Heiferman. At first, Dean created the context – an organisational platform – and at a later stage he developed his political project around it. *MeetUp* and his experience in electoral fundraising were crucial to Barack Obama's success in the Presidential Election of 2008.⁷⁵ Unlike the two American politicians, Casaleggio did not have a party in which to place his movement. Nor did he want to set one up; he was already looking towards a post-democratic era.⁷⁶ He was right to advance the need of a strong connectivity between the physical world and the digital / social world: by linking the latter to the physical communities of a given area, the potential of digital

74 Sifry M., 'From Howard Dean to the tea party. The power of *MeetUp.com*' published by *CNN* in November 2011. The website is now used by other organisations such as the Tea Party and Occupy.

75 Regarding the technical rather than ideological ties between the electoral machines of Obama and Dean see A. Berman, 'The Dean Legacy' published by *The Nation* in March 2008.

76 The attempt to imitate Dean and his platform dates back to 2009, when Beppe Grillo tried to join the Italian Democratic Party, inspired by the outsider tactics of Dean with the US Democrats. It was logical for Casaleggio to try and emulate Dean's organizational model: the conquest of political power and autonomy within the traditional Democratic Party, which would have then functioned as an incubator for the Movement. The immediate ban of Grillo gave birth to the heterarchical organizational model that we are commenting on which, once again, is Casaleggio's PLAN B.

77 The strength of the political interface between chthonic and cosmic is described in M. Thomas, H. Waldram, E. Walker, *Connected: the Power of modern community* (Guardian shorts, 2013)

78 It is but a matter of time before the ongoing test of e-politics and digital populism will give rise to a structured discipline. In the meanwhile you can read the *International Journal of E-Politics* which 'establishes the foundations of e-politics as an emerging interdisciplinary area of research and practice'.

79 Such as the expulsion of Giovanni Favia and Federica Salsi at the dawn of 5SM, or the purge of MP Adele Gambaro, hacked in June 2013. Such expulsions are very similar to those perpetrated by twentieth-century Fordist parties, with digital slaying and network(ed) insults rather than party meetings.

networks would increase tenfold, becoming the most powerful propagandist device. This can be seen as a classic example of how the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.⁷⁷

Heterarchical organisation

La Rete, which means the network, cannot have a hierarchical structure, not even when it is considered as social network. The network is horizontal; it has no reason to exist outside its nodes and horizontal connections; it cannot be a top-down model. Digital populism rejects the rigid traditional Fordist-Taylorist party organisation, to substitute it with a form of disorder, which is, nevertheless, under control; this system is effective when faced with the non-predictability of complex systems. 5SM requires an experimental model, an organisational prototype that

encompasses the horizontal nature of social networks, as well as its discreet remote address. Besides the influences from Google, Casaleggio advances the hypotheses of 'heterarchy' and autopoiesis for this new model. It is a difficult challenge: even dot-com and 2.0 companies have traditional hierarchical business structures. A real network – one that is composed of real people rather than of bots and trolls – is a vital and spontaneous ecosystem made of interconnections and diverse elements. How can one rule over this ecosystem without a firm leadership, without that *heroic* approach that is shared by both analogue populism and traditional 20th century parties? The answer must lie in a heterarchical organisation. As it is widely known, 'heterarchy' means neither hierarchy nor anarchy. It suggests a subtle, almost covert leadership position, as obscure as the traditional hidden agenda of the Internet is. Heterarchy is polycentric; it multiplies the power nodes, so that they do not become subordinate to the top. For example, within the Movement, the continuous frictions between parliamentary groups and Casaleggio Associati's smart-

marketing team, the communication between MPs and Beppe Grillo's bloggers and between *MeetUp* and elected representatives, all exemplify autonomous power nodes in conflict with each other. The movement has a multifaceted nature: it is made of partial achievements of single sections, individual decision, attempts at autonomy, evasive attitudes, calls to order and expulsions. The political power of a single MP or militant is heavily constrained by the unpredictable policy pursued by Casaleggio Associati. The Movement's experimental⁷⁸ heterarchical model is now being tested and adjusted to the real world: since 2013, each of the 5SM'S political actions showed that a deep gap existed between a real heterarchical concept and a false heterarchical practice: the latter is what the two 5SM's leaders have been putting into action. 'Each one is worth one' was the slogan coined for the five-starred mass; it glorifies the egalitarian decision-making power of the individual, yet it is contradicted by the evident authoritarian approach of the duo Grillo–Casaleggio.⁷⁹

Mimicry and adaptability in the society of control

Dreams of power haunted Casaleggio in the early 2000s. These dreams have some aforementioned characteristics: they envisaged a network thickened by independent nodes and self-managed groups of militants – the *MeetUp* network – which are connected within the architecture of the network. Between 2009 and 2012, 5SM became a dynamic subject inside both a highly competitive political market and a complex unstable society. The movement adapted itself to these socio-political conditions through a process of self-organisation which regarded both each single node and the network as a whole. It was a camouflage technique that allowed the 5SM to: (a) maintain its chaotic and plural identity despite the socio-political inputs that were coming from external sources; (b) quickly respond to unexpected events, which we define as 'black swans'; (c) flourish within the neo-liberal context of Internet ideology; (d) support a mixture of inexperienced and inefficient policies that are typical of young autonomous organisations; (e) influence its followers' behaviour through three skillful actions, which put together a spectacular scenery, brand communication and a self-regulating mechanism; (f) decide for a strict membership policy, enlisting a series of minimum requirements that can lead

80 See D. Moon, P. Ruffini, D. Segal, *Hacking Politics. How Geeks, Progressives, The Tea Party, Gamers, Anarchists and Suits Teamed Up To Defeat SOPA and Save the Internet* (Orbooks, 2013)

81 The final bluff is Beppe Grillo's 2014 tour of Italian theaters titled *Lemme show ya the EU*. This is the last paradox: a campaign happening in the profitable confusion of theater and politics. Are Grillo's rallies free satirical show or is his satirical theater a ticketed rally? The B2C phase of the *Movement* is at his highest point in this spectacular short circuit.

to expulsions if not respected; (g) at last, stimulate a bottom-up self-regulation and a lasting identification with the 5SM brand. An example of the 5SM political approach is given by the hacking policy⁸⁰ that have characterised the first year of institutional activity of the group.

The following are episodes of hack politics: in April 2013, the movement used online '*Quirinarie*' to choose a candidate who would rush into Parliament and unsettle the election of the President. Other example are the live-broadcasted meetings between 5SM and *Democratic Party* delegations, which transmit tactical fractures and a lack of conversation between the five-starred MPs. The idea of disrupting the usual functioning

of politics is rooted as much in the unusual idea that citizens can gain power from hacking institution, as in the 5SM's lack of those intellectual and professional skills that institutional politics require. Casaleggio's main aim is not to balance the disorder of the political system, but rather to destabilise this system from within and keep it in a chaotic situation. The 5SM wants to amplify disorder and desires, as Luciana Parisi points out, 'a new kind of nihilism.'

The disrupting agent

How to orient a self-organised network in which members are granted with autonomy and horizontal leadership? How is it possible to control a *self-regulated* system without a top-down structure that dictates a program and guidelines to the bottom part? Casaleggio's solution is a 'disrupting agent', namely Beppe Grillo. Grillo is an authoritative figure who provides the 5SM members with self-doubts: these are discreet but significant disturbances, whose real goal is to prevent members to have political positions that are different from the 5SM's orthodox message. Grillo was given the following tasks by Casaleggio: orient voters, disorient internal dissidents, absorb political differences and expel those unwilling to agree on the disrupting agent's opinions. In exchange, the former comedian can, practice and

enhance his communicative power through his involvement in the multi-starred movement and network. He is *sine die*, the showman on the stage of a theater, which he calls politics; this is what he is concerned with. His authoritarian influence on behaviours is indirect and hidden. Casaleggio, the manager of complexity, considers Grillo as an effective tool to communicate a robust brand identity to the user-voter. What matters is the marketing message, which is targeted on the end-user: it is pure commercial logic, pure business-to-consumer. It is faster and more convenient: it is the direct disintermediation of the market.⁸¹

The political pedagogy of a creator of contexts

Casaleggio completed his own creative journey as *e-politics* theorist: he went from being a network strategist and manager of complexity to being a creator of contexts. Such an emerging figure aims at pre-determining the conditions in which new e-political practices⁸² can arise. The creator of contexts is also the micropolitical guide of specialist teams that are constituted by operators of relational processes. Here lies the movement's main strength: the cluster of relations that Casaleggio's staff manages to maintain with its network. On a political level, the 5SM as a *communicative device* wants to dominate the symbolic nature of reality and reconfigure society by controlling it through mathematical models.⁸³ In order to do so, it must absorb, neutralise and deflect the individual and collective's potential to change;⁸⁴ it must dissipate the political desire for radical change by transferring it to other sectors. Therefore, it is essential for the 5SM to establish a political pedagogy that aggressively educates people to abide by the logic of Internet ideology. The most important results of this pedagogy are: efficiency, the imposition of techno-objectivity,⁸⁵ the full disintermediation of markets, the destruction of *enlightened* political geographies, the elimination of philosophical ethics and problematisation, the wide spread of communication and marketing strategies, the micro-physics of surveillance, the elimination of social uncertainties,⁸⁶ the promotion of algorithmic regulation,⁸⁷ and finally the inauguration of the era of autonomous social models. The final result of the Internet ideology is its colonisation of public spaces, which are turned into relational-commercial ones. Thus, the future world will be described as a gigantic memory or as a

stock of excessive amounts of goods. This political pedagogy⁸⁸ won't be different from the totalitarian systems that have plagued the past century. Digital populism is an effective means for the hidden agenda of the Internet; it defeats the resistances of those who are still opposing to the algorithmic superdomain of Capital.⁸⁹

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82 The creator of context is not a social architect. In other words, as noted by Paul Godani in his interview, social movements cannot be determined but only converted, manipulated and exploited. Nobody is able to deliver new real movements. From this point of view the 5SM is a cluster of micro-powers operating in a 'zone of impotence'. The relationship between strategy and practices will always be in conflict, since the 'zone of impotence' occupied by the Movement only allows for the transformation of the energies of civic organizations, without controlling or determining them. To expand on the analysis of molecular power centers and the indefinite series of flow-mass relationships see G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, '1933: Micropolitics and Segmentarity'. In their analysis, 5SM could fall into the category of micropolitical abstract machine.

83 See B. Holmes, *Activism and Schizoanalysis: The Articulation of Political Speech*.

84 This is the pre-emptive logic that is at work on many levels of our society. Casaleggio carefully read Philip K. Dick. In 1956 he published *Minority Report*, a short story about a crime prevention Police force.

The unit works by collecting fragments of the future who are receipted by individuals *precogs*, precognitive individuals in captivity. The logic of prevention is active in the Movement, which exploits the energies mobilised by revolutionary masses, channeling it towards false anti-establishment targets. Under this view, 5SM is a PreRevolutionary Political Force. The Movement's communicative apparatus recognizes the pre-emptive logic at work, but distorts it for its advantage: Grillo has repeatedly stated that 5SM prevents the advent of fascist forces.

85 A hoax. We are within a regime of numerical truth where this artificial nature is the most fascinating and regarded as the actual nature of things. The Movement's militants do not realise the artificial nature of the *smart marketing* cage in which they are trapped: they merely realise the evenemential one of what is communicated to them according to their profiling.

86 See S. A. Kauffman, *The Sciences of Complexity and 'Origins of Order'* (Santa Fe Institute Working Paper, 1991).

87 See T. O'Reilly, *Open Data and Algorithmic Regulation*.

88 Unlike in *The Truman Show*, where a single individual is forced into a social fabrication everybody is aware of, we are dealing with an artfully constructed dimension where everybody is Truman: we are all unconscious. The master plan is known to a small team of experts, while the partial design is spatially distributed to technical segments with specific knowledges, such as electrical engineers, programmers, Internet marketer and hungry creatives. The individual merely perceives the beauty of a real-time design, immersed in a custom branded dimension. The spectacular role of both old and new media is a key element in the creation of this scenario.

89 See Antoinette Rouvroy, 'La digitalisation de la vie même: enjeux épistémologiques et politiques de la mémoire digitale' (Documentaliste - Sciences de l'information, 2010) and 'The end(s) of critique: data-behaviourism vs. due-process' in M. Hildebrandt, K. de Vries, *Privacy, Due Process and the Computational Turn*. (Routledge, 2013). At the time of *dataism*, do we need a new critic of political economy? In a relatively short time we went from a capitalist economy, to a debt based economy, ending with a data economy.





On micro-fascism

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See the middle section for all the question.

I think you already describe the situation partly in your question: gradually over the past couple of years we have seen a range of odd fluctuations across Europe. The recent surge in popularity of the right wing UKIP in the UK was preceded by the short feeling of power by the liberal party pulled to the government by the Conservatives. UK politics has long time suffered from a severe feeling of stagnancy of the bi-polar system, so a lot of these fluctuations can be explained by people trying out, experimenting, sometimes in very unfortunate ways. But on a more structural, Europe-wide level the authoritarian parties of fear have taken a too strong grip already. They range from the miserable situation in Hungary which has been neglected probably because of the South European crisis, but whose fascist policies are among the most scary in Europe to the “Finns” party in Finland whose protest party position might even stabilize. And it’s not only the parties which

express this weird mood of micro-fascism: for instance in various countries, and again not least in Finland, there are pockets of groups aggressively campaigning against feminism, for “men’s rights” and in general, a return to such gender and sexual politics that I see as scary as the racist powers emerging.

Hence, there is a need for an analysis of affect in the midst of the economic crisis. We should take seriously the ideas of Gabriel Tarde concerning the affective constitution of economics, and consider in what ways are these different destructive affects mobilized, which relate to our sense of the social (the pathology of we-ness through its exclusive qualities, the Schmittian condition that persists) and its variations across our capacities for cognitive and affective evaluation of the crisis.

For the social democrat left in Europe it is a matter of coming up with a convincing narrative and task in the post-industrial

mode of production. They have failed, despite such attempts as the creative industries New Labour. Instead, they have been branded more or less as advocates of a flimsy “globalization” which either bears the risk of meaning nothing or supporting the exploitation of workers and ecological resources on a global scale. They have been rather without solutions to the debt crisis, and incapable of resisting to the emergence of new nationalisms. Hollande’s vision for France is having major hiccups, which reflects as part of the general mood across Europe. What the conservative right is afraid of is losing votes to the extreme forces, and hence they are equipping themselves towards that pool of voters.

1919, 1933, 2013. On the crisis

We need to be able to even evaluate and consider what is the crisis. First question would be: is there a traumatic interruption, or actually is this the trauma that has consistently persisted? In other words, does our political evaluation of the situation start from an assumption of establishment of new sovereign powers of interruption in which the crisis expresses itself, and reaches out to new political powers of destructive kind emerging – or whether there is a low level background hum that characterises this crisis?

In what sense do we need to be able to evaluate the various but coalescing temporal levels of this crisis? Partly this might have to do with the cynical international politics sparked off by post 9/11 which we can perceive across various social scales: securitization of the street level to international operations of war and new technologies such as drones. But as much we need to be aware of the low level hum: not only opposing things like the drones or our government participation and deployment of such killing machines at a distance – but the more systematic violence through lack of water, food and for instance the ecological problems.

It relates to the slow sedimentation of new procedures of technologised security entangled with particular economic, financial measures: the double face of violence that has attacked us the past 10-15 years, from the violence of the military and the police to the violence of economic austerity, which indirectly links to massive amount of physical and mental casualties. I am not sure if we should just focus on the emergence of right wing parties and their popularity, but the push and pull of the established powers

who have been instrumental in establishment of the certain grim military-economic situation we are in, as well as the willingness of those established powers to give way to the extreme movements. It seems that the Tories in the UK have no problems in now taking UKIP seriously as one political party among others, it seems that the ‘True Finns’ populist voices are becoming embedded as the normal state of things in Finland, and similarly, the other examples are becoming normalised. It is the normal we should be worried about!

But it is not about escaping the crisis, but engaging with it. As mentioned above, we need to understand the various links between mobilisation of affects with the current financial schemes and the crisis, as well as the wider public sector crisis. The universities are less and less available as the places where we come up with the analysis and cognitive as well as affective coordination of powers of resistance. The management of the corporate universities are willing to spend less and less on such disciplines where this work happens. Instead, universities are becoming increasingly places of management and business studies and watered down creative hubs. Academics turn into entrepreneurs and managers of their own careers. This does not mean that we are raising our hands, but just that we need to be able to think what are the forums where to develop our own, positive crisis.

Indeed, I agree with a range of voices that for instance Rosi Braidotti summons in her new book *The Posthuman* (Polity, 2013). She reminds of the postcolonial and feminist theorists who continue to insist the possibility of thinking Europe in terms of difference: not the project of fortress Europe but one of transnational flows, migrancy, hybrid identities in language, sexuality and other modalities of subjectivity. We should not forget this legacy and remember what multiplicity there lies in a different sort of Europe already existing now too. Just take a normal bus in London, down from Archway towards Kings Cross, look at the people around you, and you know what I mean.

On the missing people

It is one thing to ask if what we mean by politics is somewhat inadequate than to claim that there is no politics. People’s frustration with political parties whether in the US or for instance

Europe is nothing new. But that does not mean that politics would have disappeared, or more accurately: we need to be aware of the range of practices that are not necessarily “politics” but rather significant for a range of measures, also for summoning a “people to come”. So yes, beyond the focus of representational politics or even identity politics there are a lot of groupings, which bring people together and formulate such communities in formation. It comes often in bursts, and not all of it is perhaps “productive” from the perspective of established politics. For instance UK has had a fair range of events the past years, from student demonstrations to the riots in 2011. There might not be an overarching explanation of what they “meant” politically but we need to understand what happens on the ground, on affective levels, on levels what Tarde would call imitational, and what produces attachments and detachments.

We definitely need more anti-authoritarian attachments that bring a different set of alliances as part of our reality. What is interesting is that also the established parties, like the Tories, tried to reinvent the citizenship power with their rhetorics of empowerment from below: the big society. Such cynical appropriations are reflecting some of the ideas we find politically progressive like local organization.

Otherwise, I do not think we should restrict ourselves with the language of “lack” like there would be an ideal sense of the political waiting for us to fulfil it. I think we need an ethical stance to the questions at hand, but also what recognizes the difficulties of everyday life. That stance steers clear of moralism and tries to cultivate new possibilities and ways of living. At the moment, we are going against a wall, too fast, on so many fronts from everyday life in Europe to the ecological implications of current modes of production and consumption. It will be around a range of questions on that axis that our new alliances are getting born.

I am not sure if I am happy to discard questions of class – or for instance the possibilities of solidarity – as left-wing dogma. There is much more to be said and understood relating to the political economy of contemporary capitalism, and a lot of which testifies to persistence of class positions even if not always in traditional ways.

On control

I think there are several different questions there, and I will focus only on the question of control. For me, the relevancy of Deleuze's short text is in how it points a move from exclusively architectures of human bodies (Foucauldian analysis of discipline) to the modulation and control of nonhuman bodies too: for instance algorithms and circuits. Marketing is of course one form of governance of bodies, and circuiting them not only on architectural, external behavioural ways but on affective and cerebral too. Marketing creates milieus of behaviour and feeling that are also affective. Such are however not completely new in terms of politics, but more of a phenomenon of 20th century: polls and advertising, moods and crowd management on affective levels are what characterizes the emergence of mediatic states of politics-becoming-marketing.

On the Googlization of politics; the financial side of digi-populism

The reason why Obama was able to mobilize such a broad "grassroot level" system was of course linked to the existence of already political structures. It was not just invented from nothing, like a political miracle. Of course, there is much there that made the case interesting but as a reform of politics, it fails. I think Evgeni Morozov points out in his new book good arguments about the phenomenon of crowdsourced politics as well as funding, and its problems: that it does not automatically mean any better governmental policies but even at times the risk of focus on rather secondary matters in a world which needs issues like the Middle Eastern crisis, the ecological crisis and the debt crisis to be solved! Morozov's case studies range from the U.S. to the European Pirate Parties, especially the Germany case, and the failure to live up to any more sustained goals.

On another front we need to remember Jodi Dean's analysis of the communicative capitalism. The conflation of democratic ideals with the rhetorics of new technological platforms from Google to Facebook is a tempting prospect that for sure is on the advertising agenda of Silicon Valley companies. However, it also

leads into a weird economic arrangement as well as dependency on those proprietary platforms. Freedom, communication and the intelligence of the crowds – direct democracy – are such lovely aims that no-one expect a horrible dictator would dare to object but at the same time the actual technologies and techniques that sustain those ideals are more complex.

Prosumer-voters hints of what is the issue: there is still a reference to the consumerist aspect of it, where politics is perhaps one form of online shopping. There is a lot of work in creating, sustaining and driving topics on the public agenda of politics and this is where the aspects of labour invested should be counted. In terms of finance, crowdfunding does not remove the fact that lobbying power remains with certain key stakeholders, as well as the biggest purses.

On digital populism, on affective capitalism

I do not know if this is a case of rescue – there won't be a god or a cybernetic apparatus to rescue us. It is more about intelligent, historical and productive analyses of the situations in which our cognitive and affective capacities are constantly being harnessed as part of value creation, militaristic politics and policies of self-mutilation, like austerity. Affective capitalism is not so much an entity to be resisted, as it is an apparatus of capture, as Deleuze and Guattari defined it. Indeed, it is in this sense a logic of power, or an abstract machine, for cultivation and capture of affective worlds. This does not mean the need to retract from affects, but cultivate more of them: joyous affects, as the Deleuzian Spinozists often call them!

One of the central questions for network activism seems to be this one about engagement and affect: do we refrain from involvement in such spheres of communicative capitalism, or do we engage head on, immanently on the level of subject topics, platforms, and exactly the mechanisms where capture happens? Does one leave Facebook or build resistance and a voice inside it? Either way, we have to engage with questions of affect and communication, but also of the non-semiotic regimes of communication: algorithms. Such platforms are never merely about the level of our everyday engagement but create the second level of data on which it matters not if your message is anti-capitalist or just celebration of friends' Instagrammed photo.

In other words, we need to continue the notion of “affect” beyond human bodies to that of other sorts of relations that sustain the modes of posthuman subjectivity. I am here again thinking with Braidotti: that the current modes of subjectivity need to be understood as crossroads between a variety of forces human and non-human, of planetary dimensions including ecology and geology, but also the algorithmic and other sorts of affordances for the digital me. Any analysis of cognitive capitalism has to get specific about the technologies and techniques where exploitation happens: not only the street, but the algorithmic too.

TWENTY-FIRST OF MAY 2013



On micro-fascism

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Australian, lives and works in London. He is Professor of Political Theory at Goldsmiths College, University of London. He specialises in, and even coined the term, *post-anarchism*. Post-anarchism generally indicates those philosophies that filter anarchist thought of the nineteenth century through the lens of continental post-structuralism of the twentieth century. In this context, the founding text of the post-anarchist thought is his 2001 book 'From Bakunin to Lacan. Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power' (Lanham MD: Lexington Books 2001). Among the books published are also 'Power and Politics in poststructuralist Thought: New Theories of the Political' (London: Routledge, 2005); 'Unstable Universalities: Postmodernity and Radical Politics' (Manchester University Press, 2007); 'Politics Most Unusual: Violence, Sovereignty and Democracy in the 'War on Terror'' coauthored with Michael Levine and Damian Cox (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2009). 'The Politics of Post Anarchism' (Edinburgh University Press, 2010); 'Max Stirner' (Palgrave, 2011) and coauthored with John Lechte 'Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights' (Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

See the middle section for all the question.

which people project their frustration and anger at the political establishment. It is as much Occupy as it is UKIP – an odd,

I'm not sure I entirely agree with the Wu Ming analysis of Grillo and the 5SM. I would not say it is necessarily a form of fascism, neo-fascism or even right-wing authoritarianism. It is certainly populist, and behind populism and the figure of the People always lies the obscure spectre of a potential fascism. But, at least in its current form, Grillo and 5SM strike me as a more enigmatic phenomenon, which is difficult to classify according to traditional political and ideological categories. It is what I would describe as postmodern populism; a form of anti-politics which seeks to create a kind of interruption in the normal political process and thereby destabilise established modes of political representation. It tries to create a symbolically empty space in the political process, to expose – or so it claims – the corruption and degradation of the political class. This is not quite the same as the fascist or authoritarian project of seeking power – a genuine fascist movement would jump at the opportunity of forming government, which Grillo and 5SM has been resistant to. Also, 5SM is an odd and at times incoherent jumble of policies and programs, both progressive and regressive, left-wing and right-wing, libertarian and populist. Many of their themes – to the extent their pronouncements can be taken seriously – are actually quite appealing: participatory democracy, social justice, ecological protection, etc. 5SM is politics or rather anti-politics as spectacle – an anti-spectacle spectacle. It serves as an empty signifier or blank screen upon

paradoxical, at times confused, and heretical movement. There is a carnivalesque aspect to it; the figure of Grillo here is less like the fascist master and more like the Pope of Fools. Of course, this does not mean that we should not be wary of all populisms – they can always become fascist. Deleuze and Guattari, after all, talk about the micro-fascisms immanent in the left and the right. It is also the case that we are seeing the emergence all around us of real and dangerous right-wing populisms which take the guise of anti-establishment protest politics. As the economic crisis deepens, as the unemployment situation worsens across Europe, there is little surprise that real fascisms and anti-immigrant racisms are on the rise. One only needs to look at Greece and Golden Dawn, as well as the resurgence of far-right forces in France. This is the perfect breeding ground for new fascisms. I fear a coming barbarism... Reich's analysis here has lost none of its validity. People, at certain moments and given certain conditions, desire fascism. It is not a question of false consciousness; there is a fascist desiring machine at work the shadow of The People.

1919, 1933, 2013. On the crisis

As signalled in what I have said above, I largely agree with Žižek's point here. The ideological field is wide open, and we are seeing all kinds of strange permutations and configurations which try to articulate the anger, anxieties and paranoia of the People. I'm not sure that neo-Keynesianism can provide an answer to this – and in any case, the economic policies pursued by the UK (although not in the UK) at least are not Keynesian or neo-Keynesian by any measure. No, what we see with austerity cuts is simply the latest guise of neo-liberalism, which most governments, of both the left and right, can't seem to imagine any alternative to. And clearly this is making the situation much worse. But I'm not sure we should see the situation as presenting a clear choice between either neo-Keynesianism or authoritarian populism. These are not the only possibilities.

To confront the problem of an emergent fascism clearly requires new collective forms of politics and struggle; we saw something like this in the square occupations and movements in Europe. We are seeing interesting mobilizations of people in Turkey right now. It is difficult to know what can come out of these

various movements and occupations, but it seems to me to be the only way to provide an alternative figure or space for collective political formations. Perhaps the People can only be confronted with the Multitude.

On the missing people

It seems to me that we have to radically re-think the figure of the People. We have to ask whether it continues to have any emancipatory or whether it is what it always was in political thought – the imagined totality out of which state power emerges; the body-politic that legitimises the sovereign. And we have already discussed the dangerous, violent, totalitarian and fascist potentiality of the People. So is there a genuine People – a really democratic People – beyond media and political manipulations? Or have we now reached the point where this idea is completely exhausted and we have to think political collectivity in new ways? My sense is the we have indeed reached this limit, and that the democratic and emancipatory energies once seen to be imbued in the People, have now completely dissipated. And it is perhaps as a symptom of this that we see the shadow of the People re-appearing in uncanny, violent and reactionary forms today. Despite the difficulties I have with the concept, the notion of the multitude in autonomist and post-autonomist thought – where difference or singularity are thought together with collectivity in such a way that one does not subsume the other – sets out an alternative terrain for radical politics. Where the People – even in its democratic form – is associated with totality, identity and sovereignty, the multitude invokes heterogeneity, singularity and a rhizomatic organisation. Other theoretical figures allow us to think through the same limit in a similar way. For instance, I am interested in Max Stirner's largely neglected (or unfairly derided) notion of the 'union of egos' – in which individual singularities can work together on collective projects without being sacrificed to sacred ideals, how they can collaborate without being incorporated into a totalitarian and transcendent body. It is something that allows us to think about the contingent openness of the political field in a different way.

On control

There is no question that democratic politics, as practiced under the neo-liberal hegemony, has been utterly corrupted and degraded in the ways you describe. The transparency and accountability that these mediated forms of democracy supposedly enable, only produce a different opacity; politics as an impenetrable mediatic spectacle, a gigantic 'reality TV' show. And of course, there is the proliferation of these modes of neo-liberal control and subjectification through the internet and social media, in which, in the narcissistic mirror of the blog or Facebook page, we construct ourselves and our relations with others in highly commodified and normalised ways, while sustaining the illusion that we are both expressing our individuality and directly changing the world. This is not to deny the importance of such networks as a tool of communication, organising and mobilizing, but there is a much broader problem with this that we need to be aware of. In an interview with Toni Negri, Deleuze says:

You ask whether control or communication societies will lead to forms of resistance that might open the way for a communism understood as a "transversal organisation of free individuals". Maybe, I do not know. But it would be nothing to do with minorities speaking out. Maybe speech and communication have been corrupted. They're thoroughly permeated by money – and not by accident but by their very nature. We've got to hijack speech. Creating has always been different from communicating. The key thing may be to create vacuoles of noncommunication, circuit-breakers, so we can elude control.

So if communication has been corrupted – and we see this today particularly with the ubiquitous technologies of communication where instantaneous connection becomes something like a categorical imperative – then we need to think of how these circuits can be reconstituted, how circuit-breakers can be introduced. Anonymity and invisibility – found in anonymous hackers' collectives, for instance – is an important element in the disruption of circuits of surveillance and control that operate through modern communication.

Obviously elections as the previously dominant mode of political communication and representation have reached their

limit. They are a sort of quasi-religious ritual aimed at the symbolic legitimation of power. It might, from time to time, and in specific circumstances, be strategically useful to participate in local and regional elections; I would not want to discount their importance entirely. But electoral politics should not be fetishised, and it cannot be the horizon of radical political struggles today. While some commentators might see the decline in interest and participation in electoral politics as a sign of a post-political malaise, I am not quite so pessimistic. It could be the beginning rather than the end of politics. At any rate, we should not mourn the breakdown of the electoral model of democracy or imagine that this is the only genuine site of politics.

On the Googlization of politics; the financial side of digi-populism

As I have suggested above, the proliferation of these new technologies of democratic communication and transparency have not made politics any more democratic. Far from it. And the new forms of blog-ocracy, micro-donations via the web, and other seemingly horizontal and participatory practices – while in some ways interesting phenomena – might be seen as a new form of neo-liberal democratic technology. They are democratic fetishes, encouraging the illusion that we are genuinely participating in the political process in an unprecedented way, beyond the control of political elites. We have to be extremely sceptical about all this. The problem is that it entrenches the market model of democracy, reproducing the subject as a citizen-consumer, a political rational chooser. It is really, as you allude to, a form of political activity completely modelled around neo-liberalism, which, after all, and in a perverse sort of way, is also a form of horizontalism in which we can all become self-entrepreneurs. Clearly, what is needed is an alternative horizontal politics in which this neo-liberal governing rationality – which only reproduces the domination of Capital over political and social life – is directly challenged. Again, it seems to me, the solution is not to return to some imagined social democratic ideal, but to invent genuinely autonomous forms of political, social and economic life.

On digital populism, on affective capitalism

The reference you make to Foucault is interesting, and perhaps it speaks to the way that behind neo-liberalism and the networks of regulation and control, there is war; war on social life, war on the environment, war on any last vestiges of the commons; a war being fought against all of us. How do we defend ourselves against this onslaught? Part of the answer is, as Foucault would put it, an insurrection of marginalised knowledges and discourses, adopting a partisan perspective in which neutrality and universalism is rejected in favour of revealing and intensifying this field of combat. It is also a question of recognising that, paradoxically, all power, even that which seems insurmountable and to bear down upon us with such force, is only our power in an alienated form. It is a power that we sustain and reproduce, at the level of our daily practices. They are the bonds we renew daily. This is La Boëtie's thesis of voluntary servitude, in which he claimed that we willingly comply with our own domination, largely out of habit. The solution to this – what produces a radical reversal in relations of power – is thus a recognition that we had the power all along, that we are always already free, and that all we need to do strip power of its illusions and abstractions is to no longer recognise it and participate in it. This would translate into changing our habits, or learning, as Sorel put it, 'habits of liberty'.

FIFTH OF JUNE 2013



On micro-fascism

Tony D. Sampson,

is Reader in Digital Culture and Communication at the School of Art and Digital Industries of the University of East London. His research work focuses upon the 'dark intersection' in between sociology, marketing, digital culture and neuroscience, with a specific interest for phenomena of virality and infection. He likes to experiment with audiovisual techniques and has done so in a few live events and talks. Sampson is co-editor (with Jussi Parikka) of the 'Spam Book: On Viruses, Porn, and Other Anomalies From the Dark Side of Digital Culture' (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2009). His latest book 'Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks' (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis) published in June 2012 builds upon notions of Gabriel Tarde's micro-sociology and Deleuze's philosophy of the event.

See the middle section for all the questions.

his public-private initiatives and laissez-faire approach to banking and communications. Now we have the coalition and their insulting mantra of "we're all in this together." Unemployment is on the increase, along with mini-jobs and their derisory contracts. The Liberals used to soak up the popular protest vote. No one believed they could ever really get into power. But they did! The illusion of bourgeois democracy is now exposed, which is a good thing, but this could also mean that many people in Essex turn even further to the right.

This broad macropolitical failure does not however explain it all. At the microsocal level of the "people" we are, it seems, seeing the continuance of fascistic political unconscious. In Essex the people have voted Tory for years. Indeed, the question the left

I'd like to think this through using Tarde's somnambulist as the situation seems to lend itself to a theory of sleepwalking subjects, but this approach should also have a UK political context. So yes, once again, we are faced with a surge in right-wing popularism, particularly here in my home county of Essex: a much maligned county east of London along the Thames Estuary. Across the UK the rise of the right should not really be a surprise. The working poor and unemployed have been hit hard by the Tory cuts. They need someone to blame and political forces like UKIP, BNP and EDL (*English Defence League*) have just the (one) policy to do that: they blame the "Others". Moreover though, many of these people have completely turned their backs on the left. This is partly due to the Thatcher-Murdoch demonisations in the 1980s, but it's also due to the failure of the kind of bourgeois democracy they experienced under New Labour. Blair's "third way" decimated left thinking in the middle ground. He moved the centre left further to the right than the Tories with

have been asking for a long time now is why people in this neglected London overspill support a political class of expensively educated, career politicians whose policies contradict their own interests? Is this a people who seek their own repression? Yes, Reich's question is pertinent once again. We need to try to rethink what seemed to him to be the perverse impulses of the fascist unconscious; a desire for repression that seeps through the layers into conscious rational choices. Why do so many people desire this kind of popular fascism? They are aware. They are not deceived. The fascist brain is caught up in a mixture of rebellious emotions and reactionary ideas against the putrid centre ground. But it is not democracy they desire. They are in need of a religion to protect them from the chaos. They crave authority, as Reich argued. They desire belief.

While Reich's binary thinking may have famously helped him to mistake the desire to be repressed for an irrational perversion of an otherwise rational state, he did point out that Marxist sociology offers an equally binary perspective of the desiring machine. They had it wrong about mass psychology. Contrary to how we perceive the masses through the lenses of Marxist thinking, they do not perceive themselves as a hard done by proletariat pitched against the bourgeoisie elite. Desire does not have a class distinction hidden inside. As Reich points out, the Marxist ideal of abolishing private property seems to clash with the people's desire for all kinds of commodities. He mentioned shirts, pants, typewriters, toilet paper, books... but today we can add iPhones and flat screen TVs. They also seem not the least concerned if it is the state or the private sector that appropriates their surplus labour. No surprise then that the promises of a return to the student protests of 1968 all but fizzled out in the winter of 2011. Indeed, it was the English summer riots that emerged as a much greater force. But this was no Arab Spring. Nobody took over Trafalgar Square. They went straight to the shopping mall. Perhaps the rioter's desire to loot needs to be grasped as a kind of perversion of the desire to shop.

1919, 1933, 2013. On the crisis

Perhaps I need to begin by realizing the limits of a my philosophical approach in this context. I cannot provide a discursive formation. It's about relational concepts rather than a series of logical propositions. This will not lead to that. We need

90 The Bullingdon Club is a secret society dining club exclusive to students at Oxford University. The club has no permanent rooms and is notorious for its members' wealth and destructive binges. Membership is by invitation only, and prohibitively expensive for most, given the need to pay for the uniform, dinners and damages. PM Cameron, London Mayor Johnson and Chancellor George Osborne were all members, as well as the financier Philip Rothschild.

to approach discursive formations by exposing the nondiscursive relations of encounter with events. For example, we can ask how the microsial encounters macrolevel politics. What are the new layers of experience that succeed Reich? What is it that viscerally appeals to the "people" of Essex? Perhaps it is fear! There is the Eastern European conspiracy / contagion here (they are coming for our jobs and benefits). They blame it on the Muslims too (they want to kill us all). What escape do we have from these formations? What kind of intervention could clear away the fog of

populism that obscures affirmative felt relations: the empathy all repressed people should have in common with each other.

On the missing people

One source of the fog of populism is the seemingly reciprocal relation between the people and the media. While some coverage of the protests in Turkey are appearing at the backend of BBC news reports, top of the most watched / listened to list on the news website have been items relating to the price of the new X-BOX, interest in Apple's new look for iOS 7; and live video coverage from Westminster Abbey of a special service to mark the 60th anniversary of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The media has also perpetuated the rise of the loveable right-wing buffoon: UKIP's Nigel Farage and the Tories' Boris Johnson. These rightwing conceptual personae help to obscure power relations in the UK, which are rapidly sinking back to a people dominated by those born to rule Bullingdon bullies.⁹⁰ I therefore agree with Tronti's point that you raise, about the people being missing from populism, or at least being difficult to make out in all this fog. A new people need to be found.

On control

We not only need to find the people, but also better grasp what their desires might be. With this in mind, it is perhaps interesting to look at the rhetoric of contagion deployed by the Tories. They do not want to defend their privilege, they say; they want to spread it!⁹¹ This is the sort of

hollow discourse that is easy to see through, but a little harder to resist. Not simply because the relations of power are dominated by the privileged, but because the “people” desire the inventions of privilege. The somnambulist subject is lead by example so much so that the examples he desires become incarnated in him. He desires to become the example that is copied. In Essex the sleepwalkers are caught up in their passionate interest in becoming rich businessmen, footballers, celebrities, soldiers, gangsters. Of course most people never get anywhere near to what they aspire to be, but are forever striving for it. So if you cannot become what you aspire to be, the next best option is to continue to follow the example. Where else is there to go? Desire needs somewhere to go.

Not that every example is unobtainable. It is fairly easy to become a soldier in Essex or at least pretend to be one by lining up in support of “our” boys through thick and thin, through legal and illegal wars. This is the threat posed by the EDL. Tarde would have described these people as somnambulists; not merely unconscious beings, but unconscious by association.

The Tory think tanks grasp this thing about examples well, I think. They employed an aspirational Essex man to become their voice in the popular press. Andy Coulson (now charged with phone hacking) worked his way up from a local Essex newspaper to become the editor of Murdoch’s poisonous tabloids. He was introduced to counter the Eton accents with the voice of working class aspiration. They needn’t have bothered because the working class in Essex have long been in love with the posh. The recent rise of right-wing buffoonery has arrived via a long held passion for inventions like Saatchi’s Thatcher and the much older Royal brand that seems to continue to soak up the desire to be repressed.

As Reich said, the working classes do not see themselves as a struggling proletariat. They see themselves in mixture with the

⁹¹ In a speech to the *Tory Party Conference* on 10 October 2012, British PM David **Cameron** promised to ‘spread privilege’ of the kind he enjoyed while growing up as he vowed to make the country one of aspiration.

middle classes. That's not a bad thing. Any modicum of change would require the involvement of all. However, unlike Turkey at this moment where it is the young middle classes who are willing to be on the streets in the protests, the left leaning middle classes here in Essex are hiding in their cosy enclaves. They have too much to lose. Even the growing instability of their jobs in the City is not enough (yet) to get them out on the streets or anywhere near their poorer neighbours. So what would it take to shake them out of their neo-liberal cages?

On the Googlization of politics; the financial side of digi-populism

In many ways this is a second front. The fear contagions perpetuated by the mainstream media only go so far. They need to be accompanied by the intimacy of something like Obama's campaign. This is just the tip of a much bigger effort to tap into, to nudge, and to steer feelings via networks. This is a different kind of propaganda model though. The networking of Obama love has at its heart a user experience designer. The risk is that the contagion will be so well designed that we'll be distracted enough and miss it. The best user experiences are invisible.

On digital populism, on affective capitalism

The politics of Tarde's somnambulist can be found in two places. The first is in the capricious force of imitative encounter; in the affective contagions that spread through the fog. Rightwing ideas and emotions can sometimes spread like wild fire. In the wake of the Woolwich murder we expect to see much more of this. The second requires an intervention into the vital forces that link example to example. What is perhaps needed is interference; not a counterimitation, but a nonimitation that breaks down the flow of certain fascist inventions: a deterritorialization. In effect, the somnambulist needs to wake up!

Many have seen both kinds of politics manifested in network cultures. Social media encourages both intervention and sleepwalking. To this extent, I am concerned that the to and fro

of e-petitions on Facebook and Twitter can also have an entropic effect on protest. ⁹² There currently exists an EDL pub in town.

Again, it seems to soak up desire rather than deterritorializing it. I wonder therefore if Tarde's vitalist imitation can replace Reich's Orgone as an anti-entropic force. Unlike Reich, Tarde was not a binary thinker. He positioned the irrationality of biological desires and seemingly rational in an inseparable in-between space. Microsociology becomes a mixture of visceral experiences, mechanical habits, and an illusion of self that is not locked away, but vividly etched with the suggestibility of the Other. It is in this multilayered culture that desires become appropriated by social invention. Quite often, it seems, these inventions take on a fascistic dimension: rural, city, youth, family, as Deleuze saw micro-fascism everywhere! So we still need to focus on resisting all forms of fascism, but trying out non-imitative interferences rather than taking counter positions.

A small, but perhaps significant interference that we have seen recently is the Railway pub in Southend in Essex. It was once known as the BNP (British National Party) pub. They used to meet there I'm told.⁹² The pub has certainly become Other. We recently saw a bouncer threaten to eject someone for a racist comment. Now it is a haunt for local artists, musicians and one would hope a shadow of a different kind of Essex people. It plays host to left-wing film nights and union meetings. What is more interesting is that the pub is not a middle class comfort zone by any means, but the middle classes are beginning to visit. Whether or not this or any other cultural hub can really grow into something that can intervene in the kind of popularist somnambulism we see in Essex is of course circumspect, but as a site of nonimitation the removal of the BNP it seems like an interesting place to explore. What kinds of deterritorialization occur in these places? What new people might emerge?

FOURTEENTH OF JUNE 2013



On micro-fascism

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See the middle section for all the questions.

Authoritarian and even fascism remain genuine threats across Europe. Increasingly there is also a threat from a kind of 'fascism-lite' or 'fascism with a human face': parties and movements which draw on populist, anti-big business or anti-banking rhetoric while proposing pro-capitalist, authoritarian, and (implicitly or explicitly) racist policies. In England this is arguably represented (albeit in the usual tepid English way) by UKIP (who despite their name are an English rather than a British phenomenon) – though there is also the old-fashioned street violence of the English Defence League.

I think there are both merits and dangers in interpreting these threats in terms of 'desiring repression'. It can be a useful corrective to the outdated and unhelpful notion of 'false consciousness', whereby people are supposedly deceived through ignorance or illusion into wanting repression or exploitation. But at the same time – whether in Reich or Deleuze – there is a risk that this notion of 'false consciousness' is reintroduced by the back door, with an implicit distinction between those who enjoy a 'good' desire (for emancipation, revolution) and those who labour under a 'bad' desire (for repression, authority) and require someone (a party, a leader, an intellectual) to enlighten them. More generally, I'm not sure 'repression' is a very useful concept: power under capitalism does not operate by repression but by inducing and inciting desire and pleasure.

Nonetheless, speaking of 'micro-fascism' is useful insofar as it draws our attention to the everyday social practices and affective investments that reinforce centres of power: fascism can develop at least in part out of the desire for a sense of order or to feel part of something, a desire that can become particularly strong at times of crisis and which can manifest

itself in authoritarian ways. This is why we should be especially wary of the ‘digital populism’ of something like Grillismo: its appeal to people’s desire to feel part of a ‘movement’ is reinforced by the narcissistic draw of social media.

Ultimately, however, explaining the rise of authoritarianism today would require a long-term, concrete, historical analysis that encompassed not merely the current economic crisis but also a variety of other factors, including but not limited to the rise of neo-liberalism over the past thirty years, rising unemployment and disempowerment, and the decline of trade unions and the social-democratic left.

1919, 1933, 2013. On the crisis

Žižek’s analysis has been validated: at the moment of its greatest crisis, neo-liberal capitalism has been strengthened rather than weakened. The reasons for this are complex, but a key element has been its victory in the ‘ideological competition’. In the UK, for example, the economic crisis has been blamed on the supposedly ‘spendthrift’ policies of the previous Labour government – hence the need for what is euphemistically termed ‘austerity’. In fact, this narrative is now so widely accepted that the present government has already moved onto a new story which emphasises our need to compete in a global ‘race’ (and so deregulate business, lower taxes and wages, remove employment rights, etc.).

So we do need an alternative narrative. But I hope that our choice is not simply between neo-populist authoritarianism and neo-Keynesianism! If anything, this seems to me to be a false alternative: if populism is that which claims to unite a society while in reality obscuring actual relations of power and forms of struggle, then it could be argued that Keynesianism itself is a form of populism, propagating the fantasy of a capitalism that can benefit all. (This does not, however, exclude the possibility that we may need to engage in a kind of strategic Keynesianism, defending the welfare state, employment rights, public sector provision, etc.: given the current context, defending the welfare state is a radical gesture.) The left does however face a number of difficulties in developing its own narrative. First, there is ideological competition among the left itself. The right has a simpler task:

it is easier simply to defend the status quo than to challenge it. Second, any worthwhile leftist analysis will focus on apersonal structures, and it is hard to incorporate these into a popular narrative (this is why there are not many good Marxist novels or films). This is one reason why we instead get populist narratives with clear protagonists on whom blame can be placed (bankers, immigrants, bureaucrats, etc.). Finally, there is the difficulty of disseminating narratives when the channels of dissemination are mostly owned and operated by precisely those that we are trying to challenge. Social media may be useful here, but social media does not operate in a vacuum: it operates within the same set of social relations as traditional media, its participants are subject to the same ideological pressures, it remains subject to state and corporate censorship and (as we've seen recently) spying. And (as can be seen with 5SM in Italy) it often just acts as a sort of giant echo chamber of stupidity: it's not necessarily conducive to critical thought.

On the missing people

In some ways Tronti's analysis is very acute: broadly speaking, contemporary populism is at least in part a product of the abandonment of the political reference to class, and we need to revive this reference to class. In doing so we also need to avoid populist representations of class which would reduce it to a series of caricatures (greedy bankers, corrupt politicians, conspiring elites, etc.) or which understand class only in terms of its manifest signifiers instead of in terms of ownership, control, and power. So there is a need to sharpen and highlight class divisions, but I do not really see what is to be gained in using the label of 'the people'. Of course we need a moment of political articulation in which we form alliances and unite disparate struggles (rather than resorting to spontaneist fantasies about a 'multitude'), but these alliances should be rooted in our concrete experiences of (un)employment, exploitation...: there's no need to invoke a 'people'. Put simply, 'the people' is not a Marxist category, and I think it's Marxism which is most useful for explaining our situation. 'The people' is a populist category, and hence regressive – but I might have misunderstood Tronti's claims.

On control

A very good question! And unfortunately not one that has a simple answer. Our initial task is simply to open up spaces in which this question can be discussed. This is why, for all its faults and problems, the Occupy movement was briefly promising. It was sometimes criticised for failing to offer an alternative vision, but that criticism misses the point that its alternative was performative, so to speak: the very act of occupation was an alternative to the increasingly brutal privatisation of space, a reclaiming of a space in which, amongst other things, debate could take place.

Marxism has an important role to play here: its hegemony may be exhausted, in that it no longer dominates radical leftist politics in Europe – although in the UK it has always been marginal – but it still provides the most rigorous and powerful critique of the capitalism that should be our target. It is also a model for a way in which to do politics: as is well known, Marx – much like Foucault – did not spend time creating blueprints for the future, but developing and sharpening analysis of the present that could be used by those taking part in existing struggles, out of which concrete alternatives are developed.

On the Googlization of politics; the financial side of digi-populism

The main job of the state today is to represent capital. Mainstream politicians are tied to that task: Obama's micro-donations have not made his policies any less authoritarian or neo-liberal. If there is a 'googlization of politics' then I would suggest it refers to something else, namely the growing political power of the hit-tech industry: its increasingly powerful role as a lobby group, the development of giant monopolies, the willing role of tech companies within state surveillance, and so on. Google is a corporation like any other – and, as such, not exactly supportive of democratic or emancipatory ends.

On digital populism, on affective capitalism

The digital world introduces new openings and possibilities, potentially offering new ways for people to become politically active, but it also brings with it certain risks: the focus on speed and simultaneity does not necessarily aid thoughtful critical reflection, and the often individualised and privatised nature of digital activities are not necessarily conducive to collective struggle. We need to think through these issues without resorting to moral judgements which either simply celebrate or condemn, resisting both the techno-utopian propaganda promoted by the tech industry and the reactionary, nostalgic anxiety which inflates the novelty of digital technology by catastrophizing its impact. What we need instead is a dispassionate historical-materialist analysis which locates these developments within contemporary capitalism, examining the impact of new technologies on distributions of wealth and power and situating the uses of digital technology within existing social relations.

And of course we should avoid seeing digital technologies as a panacea. I've always been struck by a comment from Deleuze, which seems ever more pertinent: 'We do not suffer these days from any lack of communication, but rather from all the forces making us say things when we've nothing much to say.' This is one of our tasks today: to resist the demand that we say something.

SIXTEENTH OF JUNE 2013



On micro-fascism

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See the middle section for all the questions.

My inclination would be to bracket the explicit invocation of fascism, bound to distract us from a proper physiognomy of our political moment, and stress instead Wu Ming's reference to the way in which the SSM had piggy-backed on, but also sapped, many struggles against the dispossession of public spaces and common livelihoods (e.g. No TAV), bending them to the benefit of a remote-controlled anti-politics of the 'angry citizen', and drawing them away from their profound continuity with other anti-systemic or far left movements. The SSM itself, in all its ideological ambiguity, is a pretty precarious condenser of all the loose political energies, destructive and constructive, that the crisis has thrown up. As repugnant as the figure of Grillo might be, or as depressing as we may find the political culture of many of his followers, the stresses and strains that Grillo has suffered ever since February – which he accompanies with ever shriller doses of pompousness and braggadocio – should perhaps warn against excessively gloomy prognostications.

In this regard, the break between Grillo and his MPs over revoking the vile Bossi-Fini law on immigration is symptomatic. While they responded to the outcry over the drowning of hundreds of migrants off of Lampedusa with an act of liberal humanist decency – which, for all of its attendant ambiguities, was far preferable to the exquisitely hypocritical day of national mourning called by Letta – Grillo yet again showed that nationalism, chauvinism and indeed racism are part of his repertoire. If anyone was still in doubt,

his response to that event, as well as the now periodic rants against the indiscipline of his supposedly horizontal movement, confirm that Grillo (and his marketeer, Casaleggio), if not necessarily the 5SM itself, is a figure of the right.

As for the 'toxins' of which you speak, they are indeed ambient, and require unsparing opposition – especially in terms of the vicious and endemic forms of racism that the crisis has accelerated (from anti-Roma violence to the UK government rolling out of 'Go Home' vans in Black and Asian areas of the country). But I would not rush to call the *Manif pour tous* in France, UKIP or various movements of the European Right 'fascist' (needless to say, with the several exceptions of those who lay claim to such a heritage, most dangerously Golden Dawn). Nor are these phenomena – especially racism – in any sense 'micro', in the sense that Deleuze & Guattari wrote of 'groups and individuals contain[ing] micro-fascisms just waiting to crystallise'.

I wonder whether the theory of micro-fascism is not in some respect a far too elaborate tool with which to confront the attraction for a downwardly mobile petty-bourgeoisie of 'cognitive mappings' of the crisis that identify clear culprits and allow one to enjoy a sense of innocence and victimhood (the circulation among some 5SM followers and MPs of conspiratorial economic theories may accordingly suggest that, to paraphrase Jameson, Grillo is peddling 'the poor man's cognitive mapping'). Though 'socialisms of fools' are bound to ferment in interregnums such as our own, we could also note, somewhat more hopefully that, for all its ambivalence, the incorporation into the 5SM programme of an orientation towards common, social needs points us to the presence in Italy's political unconscious – despite the defeats and suicides of official and movementist lefts – of something like 'micro-communisms'.

1919, 1933, 2013. On the crisis

Especially in the Italian case, we should be very wary of indulging in the pastime of guffawing at the absurdities of the right. The seventies radical adage, 'una risata vi seppellirà' ('laughter will bury you'), has alas been proved wrong time and again. Unfortunately, unlike its adversaries, an anti-capitalist politics cannot operate at purely discursive or narratological,

which is to say ideological, level (this is where I think radical-democratic, post-Marxist revaluations of the category of populism are also very limiting). While Grillo can profit from the inconsistency of his discursive operation, thus holding together the votes and aspirations of a motley array of voters – orphans of both left and right – it would be calamitous for the left to think its task is to come up with a 'better narrative'. I'm not gainsaying that world-views and watchwords ('we won't pay for your crisis', 'the 99%', etc.) are an indispensable element of politics, but contrary to forces of the right whose discursive radicality accompanies a fundamental acquiescence to basic structures of social power (e.g. the link between nationality, citizenship and social rights in Grillo), the challenge for actually anti-systemic politics is to combine a strategy for transforming social relations with the capacity to defend and further working poor people's interests in the present. Though rooted in deep structures of phobia and projection, the racism and classism that makes possible the gains of the contemporary right is very much based on its capacity to present itself as a kind of biopolitical advocate for the 'losers' of the crisis – and some of the explicitly fascist groups, from Casa Pound to Golden Dawn, have played precisely on this register, of providing 'public services' (housing occupations, vigilantism, etc.) to 'white', 'national' populations.

I think it would be inappropriate to define North Atlantic austerity regimes as neo-Keynesian – while breaking with neo-liberal doctrine as actually existing neo-liberalism has always been happy to do, bank-bailouts, quantitative easing and the roll-back of public provisions all belong to the uneven but ultimately homogeneous field of capitalist state strategies to socialise losses and privatise gains. Contrary to ephemeral euphoric declarations of the death of neo-liberalism by people too quick to see epochs and events around every corner, I think we should be more patient and recognise the considerable capacities of capitalism to reproduce itself by making our own social reproduction dependent on it – 'neo-liberalism', if we still wish to use the term, does not reproduce itself primarily as a narrative or belief in the straightforwardly cognitive sense, but as a set of social devices and 'real abstractions' that govern us in many ways irrespective of our overt attachments.

In this regard, I think a more sober estimation of our present may want to revisit the debates on neo-liberalism as authoritarian populism triggered by the work of Stuart Hall, or consider, following the work of Paul Mattick, Jr., how both the ideas of a

lean state imagined by neo-liberal pundits and neo-Keynesian recipes for recovery obfuscate the crisis-dynamics of capitalism, deluding us that new narratives or political regulations could somehow magic away the fact that devastating devaluations of living-labour power and of our built and social environment ('fixed capital') are ineluctable dimensions of a system driven by the imperative production of surplus-value.

On the missing people

Populism is such a fraught notion, and such a favourite term for those crisis-managing elites who wish to discount and dismiss anti-systemic drives, that one should use it with extreme caution. From Tsarist Russia to the late 19th century US, and on to 20th and 21st century Latin America, we could loosely identify a 'left' populism which formulates opposition to exploitative domination outside well-defined class antagonisms (because the unevenness that you mention has not given rise to ideal-typical bourgeoisies or proletariats). The question such populisms throw up regards, as far as I'm concerned, primarily the question of how we define antagonism and partisanship, and only secondarily the question of political agency and collectivity ('the people').

We could perhaps see 'populism' not as the invariant, repetitive matrix of political subjectivation (the tendency of Laclau and others), but as a moment present in any movement of emancipatory opposition – but it is a moment that requires criticism and transcendence, especially for one of the reasons you suggest: the tendency in 'populist' movements to treat 'the people' as wholesome, innocent, the victim of depredations by a parasitical minority. Against this ideology of offended innocence, of the 'good people', I think we need to strongly affirm the far more conflicted legacy of a 'dialectical' politics, which struggles against the temptation of moralism, and does not ground antagonism in ethical superiority. Or, as Franco Fortini put it: in the list of your enemies, write your own name first.

Politics is, in many respects, a matter of decision and demarcation of us and them, but the moment the 'us' is identified with the ethical substance of the Good on is set on a dangerous trajectory. More generally, I have recently been struck by a kind of neo-Jacobin temptation in discussions of communist politics –

let me address here an indicative case, Jodi Dean's defense of 'the sovereignty of the people' in "The Communist Horizon".

Some caveats. First, I am in no doubt that the erosion of popular sovereignty is one of the distinctive facets of our moment, and of the capitalist management of the financial crisis in particular. The reclamation and perhaps reinvention of popular sovereignty against the odious machinations of 'sovereign debt' in Greece, Spain and elsewhere is an important political development. Second, Dean is careful to distance herself from any full, organic version of the people, such as may be encountered in what takes the problematic name of populism. Even with these caveats in mind, I do not recognise 'sovereignty of the people' as an intrinsic determinant of communism, which is probably why I strain to see the galvanising upsurge in popular assembly and insurgency as testament to the idea that communism is a 'present, increasingly powerful force'. Very briefly, let me try to explain why.

There are broadly two tendencies in how one conceives of the relationship between communism and prior movements of emancipation. A thesis of continuity defines the first, of which I think the later Georg Lukács was the most able theoretical interpreter and Palmiro Togliatti the most eminent practitioner, which sees the communist movement picking up the flags that the bourgeoisie has abandoned in the mud; the communist revolution sublating, which is to say also incorporating, the bourgeois revolution. This tendency broadly retains the crucial concepts of a Jacobin radical liberal tradition, in particular the people, the state and the law.

The second tendency – for which I think two key texts are Marx's Critique of the Gotha Programme and Lenin's gloss in State and Revolution, but also much of the left-communist 'heretical' tradition and so-called value-critique from the 70s onwards – poses that there is a radical discontinuity between communism and the political radicalism of the bourgeois tradition. It stresses the abolition of the value-form and the withering away of the state. The standard for what counts as communism here is high indeed – which is why Lenin had to recognise in the early 1920s that Russia was still, after the revolution, a capitalist society, albeit one run by communists (and ones who had to reinstate capitalism with the NEP on pain of defeat). It does not deny the progressive value, in certain moments, of popular sovereignty, but it aims for it to be transvalued, so to speak, rather than sublated, by workers' control – a term which I do not think can be treated as synonymous with

popular sovereignty, on pain of losing historical specificity.

This transvaluation also involves another, to my mind, crucial distinction: between radical and communist conceptions of equality. Communism is not just a more perfect equality, precisely to the extent that it seeks to overturn the very basis of even the most enlightened conceptions of equality, to wit the rights of the individual founded on the commensuration of labouring individuals under the standard of value and the rule of property. Here the question of the state is critical – though the site of considerable victories, the state, when founded on popular sovereignty also depends on making a claim founded on the representative apparatus (and here I just want to note my sympathy for Jodi's critique of the fashionable critique of representation). This claim, to legitimacy, is what allows it to repress people in the name of the People, according to a mechanism which, though we may find obscene, is very difficult to counter.

To the extent that the state, under capitalism, serves to provide a unified fulcrum for a trans-class identity, and does so through the very idea of popular sovereignty, it remains at best an ambivalent phenomenon. Though the demand for a state of all the people can be radical, even ruptural (from the progressive postwar constitution in Italy to contemporary struggles by Israeli Palestinians for full citizenship) – and the interclass appearance need not, though it often is, serve as a mechanism of class rule – it is in the end against or at the very least beyond the idea of sovereignty, and of the people (which is rarely extricable from citizenship of a state, identities and privileges) that communism has staked its claim to differ from both radical liberalism and social democracy (both of which, I am happy to recognise, seem beacons of emancipation in the current moment).

The proposal of a constituent rather than constituted people, or the delineation of a popular sovereignty which exceeds the state in the spaces of appearance of assembled bodies, as in Butler's recent article 'We, the People: Reflections on the Right of Assembly', do not seem really to transcend the intrinsic relationship – again, not devoid of ambivalence or progressive potentialities – between the capitalist state and popular sovereignty. The state, in its transcendence, absorbs the division of the people into its unity, over and over again – creating a vertical distinction between the represented people and people in their 'uncollected state' (this is the strength of Badiou's critique of representation). In this respect I think that, for all of the virtues of tactical or even strategic

populism, the division between the rich and 'the rest of us' risks repeating the dangers of what we could call the 'popular horizon'.

First, because to remain at the level of inequality itself, of the 1 and the 99%, neglects that when workers fight in the domain of distribution 'They ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects, but not with the causes of those effects; that they are retarding the downward movement, but not changing its direction; that they are applying palliatives, not curing the malady'. Communism is not simply a struggle against the rich, and it cannot, for analytical and strategic reasons, treat the exploited as a homogenous group. It is a struggle abolish the very relations that produce us as the subjects that we are, which means that one of the dimensions of the 'rest of us' narrative is both necessary for it, as the initial claim for a wrong, and must ultimately be undone, especially when it involves the rest of us imaging ourselves as more or less innocent 'victims' of capital.

Second, to retain a purely political idea of the us, in both unity and division, which neglects the profoundly political character of social divisions, especially of class and race. The people is a name almost invariably shadowed by national adjectives which trail behind them their own histories of subjugation, which is to say by the horizontal division of peoples within states themselves – as Sadri Khiari points out in his essay *Le peuple et le tiers-peuple*, working-class French citizens of African origin do not generally consider themselves or are considered part of *le peuple*. Though state, people and sovereignty remain critical domains for any strategy that would wish to call itself communist, the latter stands or falls as a distinct political tradition on the abolition of the form of value and the correlative dismantling of the state, to be replaced with an organisation of resources and activities and institutional forms for which the modern tradition of sovereignty cannot serve as a model. Though it may make one want to reject it in the end, I think we have to retain the specific difference of communism vis-à-vis radicalism, Jacobinism, state socialism, social democracy, and other traditions in the broad Left.

On control

I'm not sure what is meant here by 'the exhaustion of Marxist hegemony'. If this refers to the fact that the categories and organisational forms of the First, Second and Third Internationals no longer orient the politics of the left, then it's an exhaustion that we can date to the 1970s at the latest, though, as Fredric Jameson has aptly noted, 'post-Marxisms' spring up with every crisis of capital ('Five Theses on Actually Existing Marxism'). This loss of political hegemony is a simple fact, but I do not think we can draw from it any linear conclusion either about the categories (especially) or the organisational forms that we may associate with Marxism (and which often, as with union associations, parties, strikes, or what have you, were never straightforwardly products of Marxism). I also think there is something debilitating about the widespread notion that what we especially need is a new narrative, a new paradigm to break with 'ideological consensus'.

The problem is not breaking with our conscious belief in capitalism or neo-liberalism, but with the deeper embeddedness of our everyday life in the material devices of capitalist reproduction – our subjection to wage, credit, property, insurance, etc. But that is a matter of political-economic practices, not (primarily) narratives or world-views. There is no shortage of instances of collective antagonism out there (see Alain Bertho's *Anthropologie du présent* website for a running tally of our 'age of riots', or the China Labour Bulletin, or the reports of the maritime insurance agency The Strike Club to their clients, if you're in any doubt that we categorically do not live in a post-political age, 'after' class struggle). Our difficulty lies far more in mustering up the energy, steadfastness and inventiveness to practice collective politics than in breaking with the supposedly capillary hold of ideology. Starting from the movements around social needs and demands that have sprung up against austerity – mobilisations against hospital closures, collective platforms against house evictions... – and thinking how these could be federated and turned into a challenge to capitalist rule is a much more urgent task than challenging the ideological grip of a system which does not, to my mind, primarily depend on consensus, but on the lived, everyday experience that we cannot reproduce our lives outside of compliance with exploitation, our own and that of others.

On the Googlization of politics; the financial side of digi-populism

This is not a phenomenon on which I have any real knowledge, so my comment can only be impressionistic at best. At the risk of sounding like a reactionary techno-phobe, I am certain that mechanisms for financially exploiting people's desire for pseudo-agency (the politics of 'like') will accelerate in intensity and algorithmic sophistication, but I do not think there is anything positive to be extracted from the figure of the prosumer-voter; the political metaphysics of social media (rather than the very limited, if at times very efficacious uses, to which they might be put) which governed the mis-representation of uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, or the self-adoration of the 5SM, is a hindrance to thinking forms of political action adequate to the present. In terms of the 'googlization' of politics I think the 1970 British dystopian comedy *The Rise and Rise of Michael Rimmer* provides us with a very nice allegory, especially as it links the alienating pseudo-activity of 'clicktivism' with its obverse, authoritarian populism. The critique of the serial interpassivity of electoral representation is not going to take place through fantasies of digital emancipation.

On digital populism, on affective capitalism

I think a first step in the defence would be to resist the tendency to amplify capital's own narratives of novelty with our supposedly critical categories, or, relatedly, to accept at face-value its dreams of full spectrum dominance over our consciousness and unconscious alike. No doubt, the mining of relations and emotions for profit has reached staggering levels of ubiquity and sophistication, but this does not mean that we live in a new capitalism – one somehow not requiring the exploitation of living-labour power, one not plagued by the contradictions between the fixity and mobility of capital, one not beset by crisis-tendencies, etc.

'Affect' – a terribly inflated term in contemporary theory – has not 'resolved' any of these limits and contradictions. One of the historical dimensions of workers', subaltern and revolutionary movements was that of being able to create relatively autonomous

spheres of cultural production, forms, contents and social relations somehow alternative or antagonistic to those of its adversaries (a kind of cultural dual power, if you will, sometimes doubled by a 'biopolitical' dual power, as in the Black Panthers' health care programmes). So, aside from the delinking option, there might be something to be said about not taking for granted that our social interactions or political organising should take place in platforms which are proprietary, profit-oriented and formatted in ways that canalise communication into particular patterns and redundancies. Short of 'socialising' social media, in the way that Lenin may have spoken of socialising the banks, I think there is still a lot of room for reviving more systematic debates about the construction of counter-public spheres. Otherwise, defending oneself against digital alienations risks becoming an individual, therapeutic question – just think of the cottage industry of online advice about how to spend less time online, or even programs to block pathological compulsions to connectivity (like the symptomatically named Antisocial and Freedom).

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On micro-fascism

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longer the case in any of the countries that we still call democracies.

EMPTY DEMOCRACY

We have long since ceased to live in a political regime that can be defined as purely democratic: this is proved by the way citizens elect their representatives and monitor their work. Nowadays citizens are denied the chance to lead the process through which decisions become relevant for the community. In some extreme cases, such as the Italian one, citizens are also deprived of the power to choose their own representatives: this option has a unique political value and should be the hallmark of any representative democracy. Paradoxically, in most cases this power seems to be guaranteed, and yet the real power is constantly transferred to other institutions: the citizen can only participate in fake democratic elections. This 'carnavalesque' celebration lasts four or five years, during which it is made impossible to control the objectives pursued by the elected representatives and the ways these objectives are achieved. No democratic regime has ever allowed a real 'people's power' probably – except during its initial phase. However, it is likely that during certain periods, which vary from country to country, the elected representatives mediate popular objectives and are able to turn those objectives into effective policies. Unfortunately, this is no

THE RETURN OF THE ELITE

For a long time – and not only in Italy – governments' power has been constantly appropriated by elites, whose significance is determined by their dominant role in the economic, political and social sectors. These groups – which are generally interconnected and which usually exchange favours to maintain their position of power – form an oligarchy based on

and determined by finance. In order to fully understand the scope of this process, one needs to realise how globalisation is not the result of some spontaneous market dynamics – as it is often claimed – but rather it is a phenomenon consciously pursued by the world economic elites; this to avoid the possible political constraints and the limits imposed by national courts, where the old and obsolete power of states express itself.

Globalisation is mainly the product of an area that has been freed from politics and law, a space in which the financial oligarchy can freely unfold its plans for achieving wealth and power. It is the extreme result of a war that was fought throughout the 20th century: the conflict between those who wanted politics to control the world of economics and finance – on behalf of the community – and the economic elites who eagerly pursued the return to the pre-crisis status of *laissez-faire* capitalism. This fracture had developed during Roosevelt's New Deal and the decades of social democratic compromises that followed the Second World War, which were inspired by the Keynesian doctrine. The aim was to make the coexistence of democracy and capitalism possible, in a situation where the state acted as a regulator of social conflicts through the medium of public welfare. Since the beginning, this change – which was imposed by the trauma of the Great Depression – was perceived from one part of the world capitalist-elites as a dangerous drift for the capitalist system; for this reason, reformist projects were brought into being, such as the thirty years long period of neo-liberalism, which was then added to the grand scheme of globalisation. This is the result – one that is today confirmed on a universal level with the emergence of a global hidden oligarchy – of a long process that saw the generation and social affirmation of the power of the elites in all sectors of life. This process can be identified throughout the spread of democracy, which took place all over the world. The first wave of democratisation was a reaction to the crisis of 1929; this economic downfall was perceived as a clear manifestation of the limits of the *laissez-faire* capitalism. It became clear that the leaders of the capitalistic world, and especially the American ones, were under attack; for this reason, initiatives were established to resist against the "excessive" demands of democracy. These initiatives supported the interests of industrial and financial capitalism, which started to take form at that time. Throughout the West, political parties were caught in the process of social penetration of the elites, becoming the nucleus of the elite power and transforming themselves into powerful

elites; they were meant to represent the citizens, but instead they governed following the interests of the above-mentioned capitalist elites. In return they would participate in the economic power and the wealth it creates. Democratic systems have collapsed because party leaders have subjected themselves to the strategies of the economic elites. Parties, even popular ones as mass parties, turned out to be easily affected by their leaders' connections with the economic and financial power. Corruption has become a stable element of the political landscape; it is the perverse instrument through which democratic mechanisms favour the interests of the ruling elites. People's response has varied. The main reaction has been one of estrangement from a voting system that is more and more perceived as useless, if not ridiculous. The political world, in fact, has become entirely self-referential. Generally, we tend to consider abstention from voting as an act of moving away from politics. It is not always true. Abstention may also be the product of a higher political awareness, which leads to skepticism in a faster and clearer way. The effect on democracy does not change. When people start voting at random because there is no longer any hope of making your voice heard, something is irrevocably broken in the mechanism of representation. And when – as in the case of the last Italian elections – abstention reaches nearly half of those entitled to vote, the fracture is serious and it is very unlikely to be reversible in the short term.

The second reaction to this situation is even more insidious, since it tends to transform and to distort the entire democratic ethos. The populist response is the one showing increasingly conservative and anti-democratic traits – if not reactionary. It doesn't matter if its origins are in the left wing or right wing area. Populism becomes a possible perspective when a huge void characterises the relationship between the expectations / needs of the citizens and the political life; this relation finds its expression either in the abstention from voting or in the refusal to participate in what is now perceived as an empty ritual: the mandate to the representatives of the people. Populism makes its way into democracy when citizens lose their hopes of being the protagonists of the democratic life, and therefore they search for a surrogate who can represent their aspirations. This person is usually seen as a saviour, a character who imposes himself / herself through his / her communicative skills, which are very often enhanced or made up by the media.

Italy has two forms of populism today; they seem to be very different, but they are essentially caused by the same impulses and they have the same social-political consequences. They result from the crisis of 20th century politics, a system where large mass parties reflected and represented the social composition generated by Fordism. These traditional parties have become an oligarchic self-referential power, which aims at reproducing a static ruling class. Moreover, the interests of different social groups have gone into the background, being replaced by a dense network of clientelism. Large slices of the population don't believe that the solution to social problems can come from the parties anymore. Politics' rituals have become an abstruse reality for the majority of the population. Populist parties have been seeking shortcuts, and direct and simplified solutions. The illusion of a web democracy, the fake relation with people, a false agenda oriented to people's needs and trivial surveys have cleared the ground for 'miracle workers'. In this context, Grillo and Berlusconi are identical. Paradoxically, in an angry and constantly alarmed society, they both detected a desire for a real change and for the modernisation of the country; yet they both used this desire to their advantage. Therefore, the original spirit of reform was turned into a conservative strategy, which asked people once again to wait for the Messianic man who will save the world and find solutions. Populist outcomes are probably inherent in societies that have been forged by globalisation. A feeling of discomfort takes over millions of people once they realise that their lives do not depend only on their neighbourhood; instead they hinge on what millions of strangers in different parts of the planet do and decide. When people don't feel in control of their lives anymore, when they feel threatened by external obscure forces, and when the world seems to become too complex, a collective need for simplification emerges. And here again populism appears, with its intriguing selection of shortcuts, with the illusion of being able to delegate to someone else the solution of all the problems, in exchange of a visceral and faithful membership: this does not necessarily require its members to commit to a shared welfare. In this sense, populisms are always right-side and undemocratic.

1919, 1933, 2013. On the crisis

If, as I believe, we are faced with a 'paradigm' crisis – some parameters of the capitalist paradigm that were at work until the 2008 financial crisis have exploded and the main processes which structured its 'mechanics' no longer exist – this paradigm as a whole is then no longer able to control society. It follows that (1) the analysis should focus on the symptoms that herald a new paradigm, and that (2) the collective imagination should commit to plan possible developments. In the case of Italy, but the same can be said for any capitalist country, nobody should interfere with this inevitable transition, in order not to influence its outcome with traditional economic policies, whatever doctrine has inspired them. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider one of the fundamental ideas of the 'short century' that is the impossibility to influence economic and social processes and to guide them toward predetermined goals. Governments' policies are but a channel, however powerful it may be, through which an actor, that is the political apparatus, seeks to interfere with the processes caused by the millions of decisions that are constantly being made for the most diverse reasons. Being aware of this fundamental limit of 'global societies', it is possible to indicate some valuable options for pursuing the highest degree of collective interest possible.

Something that has to be eradicated from the old order through an external action – as there is no method within the system that can effectively counter it – is the privatised economic and financial power, since it acts outside of any rules and jurisdiction. This issue characterises the constitutional system of our democracies. When constitutionalism was born, economic power was not taken into account, perhaps because it was part of the change that was taking place: the aim was to defuse the power tensions fostered by the new political order, by subjecting them to rules and balancing policies. The institutional context in which economic power was left free to develop its own exclusive interest caused the development of powerful economic activities, which were led by those who sought access to wealth – once a monopoly of the landowners.

This issue is one hundred years old; it entered political agendas when Americans became wary of the disruptive power of trusts, and therefore they invented a means of control called Antitrust: an instrument which was supposed to tame the trusts' power by trying to convert it into another democratic process.

We know what happened next. The Antitrust – today it is present in almost every country in the world – turned out to be always late, always chasing the transformations of capitalist enterprises, and, above all, incapable to act effectively on a global level in the contemporary world.

Since the Antitrust was established, large firms have abused their monopoly of power – would this be temporary, permanent, local or global – while looking for solutions, tricks, organisational changes in order to avoid the rules and control of the so-called trustbusters: organisations that oversee the proper functioning of the market. To a certain extent, globalisation is the result of the pressure on society by large companies, which circumvented nationally imposed rules. An unfair competition began among jurisdictions aiming at attracting global enterprises. tax havens multiplied, and a shadow banking system encouraged the formation of a global finance, freeing it from the rules that states are trying to set.

A movement, possibly a global one, is needed. A movement that would drive attentions to this issue and promote awareness campaigns. Occupy Wall Street, with all its possible variations in different countries, is not enough, although its efforts lively demonstrate that a global civil consciousness is far ahead of the academic and political discourse. A different capitalism, for this and nothing else can taken into account, in line with the new demands of the global society can only be engendered by a new constitutional pact: this would limit economic activities, starting by controlling levels of wealth, inequality and economic power that a society can tolerate in order to be a cohesive and attractive system.

The second point is a joint one or, better, a projection of the first. A sustainable capitalism can only be the product of a collective movement, one that is large enough to provoke significant disruptions in the trajectories of current economy – at the moment dominated by strong actors, big business and Governments. Through the viral spread of small individual choices from within the market – and not against or outside of it – an alternative model can affirm itself. It would force large and globalised companies to acknowledge a framework determined by the citizens' preferences, rather than by a wild use of advertising. What is first and foremost needed is a cultural revolution that can generate a collective need for a change of our model of society, reaching again a level of quality life that is rich in values and uses economic resources equally.

On the organisation

I find it quite difficult to grant the status of social and political movement to the phenomenon of Grillismo. I'm not underestimating the extent and novelty of a phenomenon which has unsettled the traditional political categories. Yet as a simple observer of Grillismo, I have the feeling that Grillismo is the joint and transient product of very diverse processes acting within Italian society. I want to suggest four different analyses, that are interconnected and partially overlap, as everything does in reality.

The first suggestion is the existence of a fraction between the public opinion and the political class. This separation has seen a gradually diminished faith in political parties as organisations able to, although in their imperfect way, guide society towards shared goals, and thus achieving greater wealth for a greater number of people. This general lack of faith in the political system has sometimes resulted in an open hostility towards its main representatives. This negative attitude towards parties has often generated simple and visceral reactions, as well as the negation of any form of mediation through representation – without which it is unlikely for a democracy to survive. This widespread political situation has got to the point of becoming mere, rude indifference, a common sentiment marked by ferocious but effective slogans such as ‘they are all the same / they are all thieves’ and the highly popular ‘vaffanculo’ (‘fuck off’). Political debate and political reasoning – which together with the ability to mediate and compromise are the essence of politics – have been replaced by a stream of invective. The sacrosanct right of free speech, substantially enlarged by Social Networks, gave rise to a political Babel without resolution.

A new space was born, and this is my second point; here the most extravagant solutions were advanced in conjunction with the illusion of a direct democracy, which would have been enacted by social networks on a virtually unlimited scale. In this way, the very inherent limitations of this form of democracy would have been overcome. Yet the complexities of Grillismo show how uneven this road is. This political empty space, in fact, made explicit an attitude that is both a resource and a problem: the will of a growing number of individuals, especially young people, to embark on political projects. These people are reluctant to delegate decisions, and therefore they don't accept representative rituals. The best kind of Grillismo is the one that stimulates this energy, as a starting

point for the re-appropriation of a democratic life that can tackle non-constitutionalised powers, from economy to communications. One of the key issues that politics has to deal with today is how to input such energy into the representational system of in new, or at least revised, way.

The third observation is that Grillismo now is mainly a means available to those who wish to express their detachment from the current ruling class, and not just the political class. As such, its methods have been pursued by the left-wing electorate unsatisfied with its incompetent representatives.

While my previous observations concerned the questions and expectations of the 5SM movement, the last point I wish to make considers the way in which Grillismo tries to answer those questions. Without any doubts it is its eclectic populism that conveys the protest, in the attempt to seize power for an illegitimate team of people. Most importantly, this populism is enacted by a comedian, whose role as a showman is used to represent the protest and easily obtain consent in the piazza. The 5SM's agenda is not meant to embody the interests of the majority of people, but it wants to get immediate consensus, without the effort of conceiving a coherent program.

To sum up briefly, Grillismo presents itself as a double-faced phenomenon. On the one hand, it collects the need of a protest and the dissatisfaction with a political class that blatantly looks after the interests of an oligarchy, a structure built on economic relations. On the other hand, it attempts to turn representational politics into a mediated form of direct democracy, which is enlivened by a charismatic leader who empathises with his people. These people are solely entitled to applaud. The recurrent and delirious will to conquer the 100% of the electorate is the utmost example of the negation of politics and of a totalitarian surge.

On tidal waves

To put it simply, the representational system jammed and stopped producing meaningful results. The electoral results of the 24th of February both confirmed this jam and represented a dead end for the Italian political system. The most straightforward way to describe this representational problem is through the metaphor of the market. For a number of renowned reasons, the political

offer, or 'supply', and the political 'demand' drifted apart inasmuch as nearly half of the potential voters don't express their interests by voting anymore. Other large portions of voters hesitate but are still looking for someone who could embody their anger. The following are some additional considerations.

◆ Both traditional parties and new ones, albeit to varying degrees, use ideological stratagems to get consensus that no longer reflect the composition of our society and social interests. These ideologies are a facade masking sectional interests, which help an inept ruling class to maintain its position of (personal) power. Against this situation, a movement capable of giving a coherent expression to shared interests and shared perspectives must emerge. Representational bodies must go back to representing something actually existent and active in society. Unfortunately, we have not reached this point yet. The extremely degenerate nature of contemporary politics is ensuring the survival of a ruling political class that can still benefit from social inertia. The decreased number of voting people has not been productive so far, as it is absorbed by the purely formal operations of democratic representation. Radical changes are still not visible on the horizon.

◆ The destruction of social composition, the oligarchic tendency of politics, an economic power capable of dictating the agenda of governments and the disappearance of those ideologies typical of the popular cultures of the 20th century are obstacles to achieve a new shared social programme. Ephemeral alliances prevail: they are limited in range and overall incapable of having a significant impact on those power structures of the era of social-democratic compromise. Occupy Wall Street is a clear example; although it appeals to the majority of citizens' interests, it fails to be an effective political opposition. Seemingly, the only solution available to the State for leaving the 'ghetto' of political irrelevance is to recreate the 'society of the middle': once the most represented body, today it is largely nullified by our political system. This means starting from scratch, from those forms of coming together through which behaviour and lifestyle can change, and from those forms of resistance to economic power which operate locally and face the challenges of globalisation.

◆ The biggest and almost insurmountable problem of Italy is that it is a society which evolved but was sheltered from the real process of modernisation, thus enabling the survival of cultures, customs, behaviours, values and forms of relations that drew from a pre-modern social context and which ensured the

survival of both specific individual and community. This world was barely touched by the capitalist methods and the pressures of globalisation. This incomplete modernisation has strengthened a series of hostile attitudes among the deepest layers of society, where people's opinions form; the 'modern' seemed to be rejected in all its forms, despite an increasing feeling of excitement for its 'inventions'. These people were inflamed by the fascist narrative; they embraced the deep cauldron of Demo-Christian reformism without being changed by it; then they returned to exalt the anomaly of Berlusconiism, which, once and for all, revealed its populist and undemocratic nature. They represent today, as they did yesterday, a good half of the Italian people. When active, they influenced, and still do, the destiny of the country.

On the missing people

I do not know if it is possible to invent a new population. Perhaps democratic people were a great invention, one that for a while persuaded us that rights and individual freedoms had finally been resolved. The concept of people is, in fact, a metaphor that tries to unite what is not unitary: society is far from being a unitary body, and rather it is made of a myriad of cracks, splits, joints which transform it deeply. Changes are the outcomes of contrasts and local conflicts, be these intermittent or permanent contrasts, and they eventually find their way to reunite politically through the thousand streams of political representation. At any moment in history, this is the very essence of society and what determines its evolutionary dynamics.

However, we have always needed politics and those institutions able to reduce social complexity, turning it into a subject on which it is possible to decide. Precisely this aspect seems to be missing today: over the last thirty years politics has drifted away from social dynamics, it has encapsulated economic interests and it has become self-referential. The process of public decision-making, the fundamental output of a democratic society yesterday as much as today, has become a private affair of few groups of small elites that are interconnected with each other.

Thanks to the globally dominant oligarchy, a mischievous individualism gained momentum and became the most widespread and shared ideology; it undermined those elements of connection,

culture, politics and organisation which formed the basic social nexus of a collective life. Society is falling apart and seems to have lost the ability to produce cooperative values and behaviours.

On control

I am not convinced by the notion that neo-liberalism means being imprisoned. Today the ultimate phase of this process is unfolding; neo-liberalism ideology derived from the large family of 'liberalism', but in truth it shared only few traits of classical liberalism. Neo-liberalism ideology was inspired, appropriated and most of all supported by some epicentres of world capitalism, which sought to recover their cultural hegemony in order to establish their dominion over politics and economy. Cultural hegemony was the driving force behind the constant effort to dismantle the 'social democratic pact', or so-called 'Keynesian compromise': in other words, the concept of 'mixed economy'. Only the era of 'mixed-economy', with all its variants, granted life to democratic governments, ensuring cohesion and social progress through the compromise with the demands of global capitalism. As capitalist powers were weakened by the Great Depression, they had to agree on the premises of a social project that limited their freedom to act and, more importantly, they were asked to co-operate in the creation of a more equal reality.

Since the 2008 financial crisis, we have found ourselves at a similar turning point. Global society seems to be not able to impose a new compromise, the concept of a global economy; hence economics and politics will be jeopardised by the oligarchy that managed to dismiss the Keynesian compromise. This oligarchy produced world based on the dynamics of the market, which will be dominated by a small group of mega-organisations linked by a dense network of mostly hidden relations.

This accumulation of interest on a global scale is the consequence of an ideological war that was fought at all levels, in order to conquer cultural hegemony around the world. As a result, those major ideologies that had inspired political struggles during the 20th century weakened; they were not able to face or acknowledge the capitalistic challenge, thus they failed to renew their analysis and future perspective. The most serious consequence of this defeat was the collapse of socialist ideology, in particular

the whole political-institutional apparatus disintegrated, and especially political parties which had been the key protagonists of the last century's conflicts. In representative democracies, the Parties gave voice to the needs and aspirations of people, gathered consent, defined the ruling class, organised governments and shaped their programs, and monitored the implementation of laws. Without these basic functions, a democracy cannot exist, or rather it turns into something different from a democracy. This is our situation today; the real power has been transferred elsewhere, and it is used without any legitimacy, without any democratic control and in a secretive fashion.

At present, in all societies of the world citizens, more or less consciously, are trying, to find a solution to this situation, for example by returning to communicate with the democratic branch of formal power. However, most people's initiatives are hopeless and powerless, and they hardly deal with the need for a new democratic start. Over the last thirty years, both the economic and political processes destroyed the social cohesion of Western communities, threatening the coming together of a collective will that can be partially translated into a government of social ambitions.

The typical modern illusion of a political system able to guide society towards shared goals has vanished. The idea of politics as project belongs to the past. What is left is a huge void, which was created not only by the failures that politics caused, or by the illusions it fed or the suffering it imposed; this is a huge void because nobody else can fill it up, and because those elites of the global oligarchy are left free to enlarge it.

The decline of the left-wing culture, whether of Marxist, socialist or communist origins, is largely due to the fact it didn't take into real consideration liberalism, and consequently it failed to advance its own market strategy. Thinking – an action that left-wing parties have disregarded in the recent decades – of the market meant to consider it as a transient institution, a cruel and, barbaric kingdom reigned by the animal behaviours of capitalism; hence an institution that would have had to be controlled by a rational order pivoting on the state. What was needed was to understand that the market is, in fact, a necessary institution in a capitalist structure and one that, when properly understood, could tame the animal behaviours of capitalism and make them compatible with the democratic social order. Perhaps, capitalism was intended as a temporary phenomenon, it was expected to be

substituted quickly, and it wasn't seen as a lasting structure of our economies and societies. People gave up reflecting on capitalism, as it was possible to identify possible ways for it to exist within a society that was rich of democratic institutions, at the time of global challenges. As a result, the political culture of the left doomed itself to be irrelevant, and it sought refuge in a sort of haven, inside which it appears to be satisfied at times, tucked away from the harsh challenges of the present time, and from memories of better past times.

Today a striking aspect of the left is its obstinate clinging to an ideology that is mostly unable to grasp the essential needs of our society; therefore it is not capable of imagining corrective measures that have a coherent view on the existing reality. People behave as if they could still engage, with solutions belonging to an imagined past; a time that has become mythical for the members a community that has long dissolved. Culture is the ultimate political defeat of the left: its unjustified belief in its anthropological superiority alienated the left from the rest of society. This is why the political culture of the left cannot produce an analysis on the social structures, and indeed it continues to attract new enemies and ephemeral conflicts, which dissolve without leaving trace.

To break free from the neo-liberal hegemony that has emerged in the last three decades – as a result of a cultural fight that had started much before – a new civilised fight is needed, one that counters the previous one and that can stimulate shared and sharable ideas on society. It is not an easy challenge; the average citizen does not have the same means to conduct campaigns as the neo-liberal organisations had. However, a way to start is to leave behind any ambition to recreate scenarios from the previous century, giving rise to a 'left' alternative to a 'right' which also lost its solid roots in social realities. Furthermore, a careful investigation on the boundary existing between two fundamental ideas of society and two opposed understanding of power must be started. In order to do so, another false myth of the left must be revealed: the idea that the throughout history the origin of social conflict is always and exclusively to be found in the relationships inside the workplace. Work is still a fundamental dimension of social life, but it is no longer one that structures the fundamental functioning of society.

At present, the division of the social body and the geometry of power relations are no longer determined by the relations typical of the world of production, such as employees / managers, workers

/ staff, employed / unemployed, manual workers / intellectuals, labourer / freelancer; instead they are decided by the separation between those who condition the destiny of the world, moving enormous resources and powerful organisations, and everyone else. The 99% against the 1%. The powerless mass against a totalising oligarchy.

The future conflicts, if any will happen, will take place in the squares first and in the workplaces later; protests will interrogate the quality of our lives, our environment, and above all they will express the need to set limits to an oligarchic power that has taken over the world without knowing how to manage it. Today individuals – and not the mass incapable of expressing subjectivity – must acknowledge the fact that their lives, can be free and righteous only if they cooperate with each other on a global scale, by rediscovering the ways to express that collective's will that wasn't protected against the disrupting action of elites. We cannot do without politics: politics creates culture and it tames those powers threatening society. Nor can we do without parties, in theory; yet by this I don't mean current parties, I mean intermediate bodies which turn individuals into the protagonists and engine of politics.

NINETEENTH OF NOVEMBER 2013



On micro-fascism

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LUCIANA PARISI

We first of all need to understand whether micro-fascism is intended as a desire of repression, and thus of negativity, or in cybernetics terms of opposing order to entropy, or as a dissemination of entropy. One has to engage with the idea of entropy itself to understand this notion of micro-fascism. Let's assume that entropy is to information as chaos is to order, or as death drive is to life or to the self-organizing ability of a body (whether social, biological, cultural). Let's then frame the thermodynamic thesis that informs the idea of micro-fascism. From the standpoint of thermodynamics, micro-fascism is an insane distribution of the desire for destruction, rather than creation (considered positive by many). This gap between creation and destruction upon which the concept of micro-fascism you are referring to is built, is, at best, limiting and, applied to political movements, fails to see the trajectories of micro-fascism in terms of the tension between energy and information. Not in terms of the way, according to the mathematical theory of information, information overcomes noise (and the energetic tendency of a system to collapse), but rather in relation to emergence of new information dynamisms that ignore the perspective of a subject longing for its repression. Instead, micro-fascism could be conceived as the production of new dynamisms, almost counter-entropies, which do not coincide with organic energy. I would then commence by asking what kind of entropy are we talking about, and what can it tell us about political movements at a different level of analysis. Micro-fascism

does not necessarily translate to a desire for repression understood in terms of death drive. As Deleuze and Guattari anticipated, the issue of desire is by no means settled into a kind of Freudian scheme based on a thermodynamic conception of the principle of pleasure. If it is not just a desire of repression, micro-fascism, or the entropic force that invests the subject from within, when distributed on a social level – and entangled to the geology of the earth and of the human – becomes part of an acceleration of desire, a new kind of nihilism, which returns power to those neutralized by power. Aside from resorting to the fallacies of criticism – where technology is often synonymous with technocracy – there is another way, perhaps, to understand this micro-fascism, that is the forces longing for repression may also be liberating energies for a subject historically neutralized by the political organization and representation of parties whose political programs are but a script. This acceleration of desire can be defined both in terms of a futurist ‘war-machine’ – and its micro-fascists overtones – and in its overlap with the ‘war-machine’ of Deleuze and Guattari, where speed becomes a crucial attribute of a politics that needs to be understood in its complexity.

TIZIANA TERRANOVA Luciana has rightly emphasized the need to rethink what Deleuze and Guattari meant with the concept of micro-fascism, what conception of the relationship between desiring energy and information it is grounded on and how important it is not to collapse micro-fascism into fascism tout court. Perhaps this is the reason why the interpretation of grillism by Wu Ming left me cold from the beginning. I think it is different for Forza Italia and Berlusconi: in that case there was a much more direct transfer of the figure of Mussolini on Berlusconi, with a confluence of a

L'Orientale'. After graduating from the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures at University of Naples she continued her research on media, cultural studies and new technologies, driven by a passion for this area. The study of these issues took place in England where she achieved a master's degree in 'Communications and Technology' at Brunel University. She also achieved the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Media and Communications at Goldsmiths' College in London. In the mid 90's Tiziana Terranova dealt with technological subcultures, cyberpunk and published one of the first doctoral thesis on the internet newsgroups and the techno culture in California. Another important experience for her intellectual journey took place in London at the Department of Cultural Studies of the University of East London where she founded and directed along with Helene Kennedy one of the first courses in Multimedia, starting the new university course in Media and New Media Studies. Her current interests include digital culture and the phenomena that develop around it. Of international importance is her book *Network Culture. Politics for the Information Age* published in UK in 2004 by Pluto Press and in Italy by Il Manifesto.

See the middle section for all the questions.

certain neo-fascist imaginary and even organizations on this figure. At the same time, however, it is undeniable that there are authoritarian elements in the Five Star Movement. The anger of Grillo and of those who voted for him can be seen perhaps as micro-fascist according in the sense given to the term by Luciana: a nihilism that can reestablish strength to those who have been subjected to the power. All this anger is absolutely justified. How could it be otherwise after decades of television and media that, despite censorship, have fairly accurately reported all the scandals, the corruption, the connivance and complicity in the enormous extraction of wealth in Italy today, as well as (although this is often obscured by the national media) in Europe and the rest of the world? In the rhetorical verbal style of many leaders of the movement we can feel roughly expressed anger and contempt and this is what in the eyes of many people – especially the center-left democratic ones – makes them 'fascists'. Sergio Bologna was one of the first to argue that the 5 Star Movement is heir to a genre of investigative journalistic program such as “Report” or to books about the cliques running the economy.

According to the most successful 'left-wing democratic' commentators this situation should have pushed voters into the arms of the only possible alternative: democratic reformism, basically a leftist version of neo-liberalism. From that political area in fact much energy had been invested to define as extremists or fascists all those who escape or exceed its political approach. This democratic reformism has been repeatedly beaten at the polls and the Democratic Party together with the press and media of the same political area have accused of fascism and populism any form of politics that exceeded theirs (the demonization, in the sense Stanley Cohen gave to radical community centers, of the No Tav movement, of occupations, of environmental protests, etc.).

Certainly there is a line that Grillo and his blog-readers have absorbed from the mainstream media: the idea that corruption is considered an Italian problem; as we are used to thinking that the 'others' – the 'civilized ones': the Germans, the British, the Scandinavians and the Americans – send corrupt people to jail and have better politics. Grillo has not been able to get free from the discourse constructed by newspapers like *Repubblica* which continually pose Europe and the United States as 'normal countries' compared to Italy. But I do not agree with the way the Five Star Movement has been stereotyped as made of “bad” or “incompetent” people and hence as an expression of a generalized

micro-fascism that converges to the body and the voice of a leader. It seems to me that this is an attempt to bring all that is new back to something already seen and taken for granted. The 5 Star Movement has expressed a widespread anger towards a corruption which is not identifiable with one or another political party but towards the political parliamentary spectrum tout court. The movement has gone to vote not to mediate, but to take power and reshape parliamentary politics. It has tried a kind of a hack of the parliamentary politics, whereas more left-wing social movements have given up for years, because they have been focusing on the need to establish new institutions, which would avoid the traditional mechanisms of political representation. This hack or break in the mechanism has until now – luckily or unluckily, we cannot say – failed and so, rather than fall into mediation, the movement has preferred to bring a kind of guerilla warfare to Parliament. A brilliant example is the episode of the 5SM senator who introduced the amendment for the abolition of the crime of illegal immigration.

Starting from a total lack of confidence in the existing parties the elected representatives of 5SM who went to power with the mandate to depose all politicians – ‘all back home’ is a common theme – acted like players in a football match. Taking advantage of the opening of a gap in the tight defenses of the enemy around the issue of migration, which were weakened by the disruptive emotional effect of the massacre of migrants in the sea of Lampedusa a few days earlier, scored a ‘goal’. However, only a day later, the leader, Grillo rejected the position of his senator and of many of his movement. He argued that if the abolition of the crime of illegal immigration had been part of the program before the election, they would have never been voted in with the massive percentage that we have seen. Grillo seems to see his voters as fundamentally Italian citizens whose interests are opposed to those of two different social groups: politicians and civil servants on the one side, but also – less explicitly – the immigrants. That is to say the parasites linked to the state-machine on the one hand and the uncontrolled migratory flows on the other. Putting politicians, civil servants and migrants on the same level is to create the image of a citizen that overlaps with that of the ‘employer’. In Berlusconiism the employer – that is he who owns the money and the capital providing work and wealth to the social body – is made absolute in the figure of Berlusconi. Grillo scatters this power of the ultimate employer distributing it onto the figure of the Italian citizen who works

and pays taxes and becomes the employer of politicians and civil servants and looks at the immigrant only in terms of the economic advantages or disadvantages to the national economy. This is why he can also gain votes from the electorate of the Northern League although his program does not take on its most truculent traits. Another element of 5SM which might be called authoritarian is without doubt the relationship with the “programme” and the “web”. Grillo's blog has established over the years an audience to which he daily recounts the corruption of politics and of Italian capitalism, proposing them an alternative vision of an ecological and technological future sustained by a green decentralized technology based on the active involvement of “citizens”. It is no coincidence that Grillo supported the disputes in Naples against the incinerator or the reclamation of lands poisoned by toxic waste, as well as the *No Tav* movement against the construction of a high speed train line in Northern Italy. But it seems that the only way to achieve these results for the 5SM is to undergo the strict discipline programme decided by the web. To this extent the web, supervised by the algorithms to prevent infiltrations, becomes a single entity whose differences and oppositions can be resolved by voting. According to Grillo the deputies should ideally be like the masks of Anonymous: the pure expression of a general will produced by the web. So the web becomes the people with a unified will and the 5SM senators their avatars. The result is a flattening onto what is already there, a bending to massified opinion, an asphyxiation of dissent and invention. But even so, we cannot see it uniquely as a right-wing authoritarian movement but as a chaotic container that the voice of Grillo cannot fully represent nor hold. In short it seems to me that the 5SM represents a set of differences with respect to the composition of the left, which in some cases becomes fully an opposition and therefore produces conflict – on the issue of migration, on the public / private relationship... – and in other cases only remains an overlapping. But the real problem for those who do not want to get caught in the bipolar opposition between two parties is the composition (and not the mediation) of the differences. To be clear, in the mediation everyone gives something to reach a “median” compromise while in the composition it is required the activation of the invention, the introduction of new elements; the composition works on the micro-fascist nihilism in a transformative and therefore constituent way.

1919, 1933, 2013. On the crisis

LP I want to pause on the idea of crisis. Historically, the political analysis of the crisis was based on a negentropic conception of capital and its effect on society. The ability to transform energetic forces can be understood in terms of the evolution of a system towards a destructive creation or even a destructive destruction. The crisis is therefore understood as a moment that leads to a new level of re-territorialisation flowing into racism, but also sexism – Italy is rich of examples in which the crisis ‘justifies’ the repetition of political alliances against politics of identity. As a result, some say that the so-called political fragments – such as gender issues, transsexuality, ecological movements, animal-rights groups – fail to see the urgency of self-constituting into a unified political program that could propose an alternative to the narrative of the economic crisis of capital. However, I think that the call for a fundamental belonging to the working class is also a symptom of the repression that affects not only the differences, but also the radical immanence of the production of inconsistent societies whose sense of unity lies in the incommensurable core of the parts. Rather than a politics of differences, or of continuous differentiation of the socius – for many just a symptom of a political spiritualism incapable of facing the dominion of the economic crisis (that’s why the primary assumption of the working class should be kept) – let’s perhaps look at the proliferation of fractal realities in-between and within movements. Movements which are then united by fractality rather than by the uniqueness of identity. This means that it is necessary to come back again to the matrices of antisexism and antiracism as moment zero of invention – in the sense that a theoretical practice and a practical theory are needed – that breaks the identification of the ‘crisis’ with the ‘economic crisis’ and the resulting consequences deriving from this equivalence: to escape the crisis we must go through a representative reconstitution. Cartographies of reconstitution that do not fit with the homogeneous discourse of delegation can be created. In fact, these cartographies may also produce another type of representation by working within it, instead of against it.

If the crisis is no longer just a negentropic moment, which on the one hand leads to the primary reconstitution of narratives and on the other to a fragmentation of movements, which lack a real political value, then what else can be crisis? I think that, once again,

it should be thought of in a scientific, rather than political, manner: crisis as a 'collapse', as the inability to limit all given conditions in one axiom. Within this frame, it is important to understand how what we call the 'algorithmic calculation' of capital has changed, being a fundamental of its political rationality and of the way it dealt with the collapse of 2008. This algorithmic calculation does not follow finite and predetermined axioms, in that the response to x can only be z , and everything is expected, included and predetermined. Alternatively, capital seems to run on a quasi-axiomatic function, according to which the rules are constantly shifting as in response to external changes. We find the same logic at work in the interactive paradigm, in which the axioms have also become dynamic and interchangeable, and above all open to the computation of contingencies. I'm not excluding that calculation is still working in a completely closed axiomatic way, but I stress the importance of understanding that since Alan Turing the discovery of the incomputable, that is the inability of a system to contain all its forms, has fostered a culture of programmability that deciphers the crisis as unconditional condition of the calculation. In the context of computational capital today we see that the limit of calculation has become an infinite that can be (computationally) calculated. Rather than the crisis and its representation, we could speak about the crisis as a topological constant underlying both the calculation of capital – which includes the way in which emotions are transformed into work – and the fractal unity of political movement.

TT I think that compared to the 1930s we are faced with a truly infinite multiplication – in fact I would say almost infinitesimal (Luciana would say incomputable, which is not the same thing) – of the desires and aspirations of this socius and at the same time a terrible worsening of the crisis that prevents these desires from being realized. The logic of economic calculation, interest, competitiveness, and the ensuing widespread impoverishment seem to have a strong grip on the present, but we must not think that they necessarily exhaust the future. I'm speaking about the desire of a life relieved from the blackmail of work and precarity, through for example the institution of a guaranteed minimum income or about the idea of a common-fare (such as that proposed by Carlo Vercellone and Andrea Fumagalli) as the basis of an anthropogenic economy which sees the development of emotional relationships and the care of self and

others as central. I am also thinking about the widespread need for a new relationship with the earth, the body, food, sexuality or about new forms of spirituality or new way of producing objects that do not depend on the semi-slavery of the factory, and again I'm thinking about a free movement of bodies beyond borders, about the heterogeneity of life-styles that modifies the traditional structure of the families and dwelling...

All these desires and aspirations are urged by the political rationality of neo-liberal capitalism that encourages us to continually 'work on ourselves' and to desire, to pursue our desires and affirm our beliefs, but at the same time these aspirations are frustrated by the commercial logic, the extension of the working time, the debt trap, poverty and communication platforms whose only aim is the maximization of profit.

We are prisoners of a privatized currency generated by a type of calculation that cannot allocate resources in such a way as to allow us to build our own worlds including the space and the time we need to expand these desires and to experience the ways to socialize them. For this reason I like how the post-workerists have emphasized not only the need to create new narratives but also new institutions able to make these desiring processes substantial, which – in opposition to the logic of private and public – they call institutions of the common. Many of these aspirations and desires are present in a movement like the SSM but they are trapped in the logic of information and opinion and therefore struggle to produce self-training, in-depth analysis, cooperation and invention. If this matter is relegated to something that is inessential, because it belongs to culture and not to the real of the economy, or if we think that these desires can be fully captured by a unified narrative, we will not be able to understand that they can constitute the machinic infrastructure – as Guattari would say – from which a new political rationality and new ways of life could emerge.

On the organisation

TT Of course I could be wrong because everything seems to change very quickly, but right now I do not see this whirling mutation, nor I see an increase in the “grilline cells”. On the contrary it seems to me that parliamentary life might have subtracted energy to the *MeetUp*. According to me this is

the biggest limitation of the 5SM: their opposition to politics is so strong that it can become an obstacle to a real self-organization of knowledge and of desires in terms of co-research and of self-education.

From the outside, it seems to me that Grillo's Movement has grown thanks to a convergence of television, networks, squares, and localism based on medium-small cities rather than on larger cities: TV for his popularity as TV character (although he has not been directly on TV for many years) and for the continuous effect of programs such as *Report*, *Servizio Pubblico*, *Presa Diretta*...; the web, which in the form of a blog, has collected the militant activists; the towns for the *MeetUp* organization and the environmental local initiatives. This circuit, which already contained as a limit the adherence to a speech that identified corruption as the cause and not as the symptom of the 'misgovernment', seems at the moment to be stuck in the Parliament. The shove has not occurred and the movement is running the risk to transform itself into another party while its supporting audience might deflate. The question now is: where are the energies and the will to change (that have been channeled into 5SM or better that have looked out onto politics through the movement) going? The crisis is very hard and is impoverishing a large part of the population that is oppressed by exploitation, taxation and debt at the same time. In my opinion these energies are in a state of uncertainty and fluctuation. Using Gabriel Tarde's words they have been magnetized by Grillo at the moment, but where will they go in the future? Who will catch this social energy next? To me this is not clear at the moment. It does not seem now that Italy has been much involved in neo-fascist movements as other European countries, even if the presence of ultra-right organizations, signalled in the strike called for December 9th 2013, suggests that they are trying to take advantage of the crisis. Until now it has been fundamental the action of the Italian anti-fascists that despite the repressions they have experienced – including media liberal and democratic campaigns that continue to place the equivalence between fascists and anti-fascists – have prevented the fascists to take root and grow in the city for the moment.

LP I do not think that this politics is vertiginous and I do not know how to discuss the possibility of a grillina abstract-machine. It seems to me that *MeetUp* has been conceived as an influence node of public opinion, which, however, coincides with the

problematic expression of the free will of ordinary people. Consider the politics of these ICTs: the establishment of a point of view that requires to be received and mutated. In the case of 5SM, this kind of interactive imperative acting through political energies needs recognition; but it is not just a matter of the subjection of energy to this algorithmic perspective. Perhaps the problem is precisely to see the constant trajectory vector—organization forgetting that this vector already has a direction – an order and then an informational infrastructure – and therefore is not completely free in the first instance. Maybe what is supposedly captured by the 5SM, which is here discussed in terms of micro-fascism and genuine energies of dissent, cannot be separated from the entropy of information itself – namely, that there is an energetics of order itself which does not lead to an equality between energy and information, but rather to a new order of information and energy whose immanent operability we have not quite grasped yet.

On tidal waves

TT In short, the well-established voting machines are being dismantled. In recent days the Italian Constitutional Court has declared unconstitutional the electoral law with which Italians have been voting for many years. In some ways, it has been a verdict that has ratified the judgment of illegitimacy as already expressed by the polls in the last years (if we count the abstained and the 5SM voters). In Italy for years they have been conspiring to prove that there is no alternative to the bipolar electoral system where you may be with or against Berlusconi in the name of 'reforms' which means "liberalization".

The bipartisan agreement on basic political reforms (reform of schools and universities, privatization, austerity, temporary work etc.) is well established. Those who vote – except maybe the irreducible Berlusconi voters or those who vote for personal interest- do it with a sense of frustration. As I said before Grillo has built a circuit that has worked during the elections of 2013: I think he has been able to find a way to attack the two-party system from outside. He has capitalized on the crisis and the frustration of an electorate that is constantly being told that Italy is going from bad to worse and that the responsibilities are of a corrupt shameless political class. The electorate has not believed

in the idea of a technocrat government guided by Monti nor in the return of “Christian democrat values” as a solution. Grillo, on the other side, has proposed an alternative (the deputy-citizens, green politics, localism, cancellation of the 'privileges'... etc). The problem is what happens when you are in a Parliament that has been disempowered by financial governance. Is a “clean and not corrupt” parliament automatically one able to oppose the orders of the ECB or of the markets and international finance? Or would it simply coincide with a government that can only morally justify the required 'sacrifices' of the country? Whether Grillo is able to maintain these numbers is far from obvious. But certainly he has shown that the push to bipolarism is not as hard. Everything seems very stable and yet at the same time very fragile.

LP In my opinion this proves that bipolarity is not a binary structure but rather a war on the 'center' necessarily dependent on this gray zone that involves everything else. This political ground has long been contended for by the right and the left; Grillo has now occupied it by building concatenations of meanings starting from the affective, and political defeat of everything rest. He especially subtracted the obscure data from this gray zone and shined light on a wide spectrum of discontent whose arguments had spread virally through the amplification of the injunction: you are political, too. Such an amplification has given a representative recognition to the unseen data which the ideologies of both right and left have not caught but often denied. It still seems crucial, to me at least, to think more about this data and its epistemological and ontological intervention on both politics and the political representation.

On the missing people

TT I do not have a background in political theory in strict sense, but rather in cultural studies and new media studies, therefore I struggle a bit with the notion of populism. I am more comfortable with the notion of 'popular', which is a more gendered and even queer space. The Birmingham school and their reading of Gramsci taught me that the 'popular' is the battling ground for hegemony; post-workerist [post-operaisti] readings and meetings, together with research on science and technology have distanced me from direct interest in the popular, although I am still more

passionate about popular culture than contemporary art. Let's take Reality television, a 'glocal' phenomenon as we know: an extraordinary inventory of the desires of subjectivity and of the "dispositifs" through which these very desires are channelled towards competitiveness – the myth of individual success ('One in a thousand makes it if s/he has the *X Factor*', everybody else must leave the show). In the last fifteen years American TV series have produced a series of incredible narratives and images of a people, the American one, which is expressed in a variety of figures and characters often represented in the act of falling. The male characters of almost all successful American series are pictured in this falling moment, from the panic attacks of Tony Soprano, to the free fall of Mad Men, from the sinking of the polygamist family in Big Love, to the 'fall' into crime, however reinterpreted as rupture, of Breaking Bad. I like to think of the people Tronti invokes, opposed to patriarchal and authoritarian populism, as emerging from the popular, as a possibility to be found in the popular. It seems superfluous to recall how Berlusconi built its success by taking over and re-inventing the national-popular, and especially women's bodies; however it may not be so superfluous to recall that the Left has perhaps lost it by not being inventive enough in this field. Literature, television, music, comics, films, art, but also festivals, rallies, the arts and disciplines of the body. Are these not the places from which a Rabelaisian people can emerge, in the sense given by Bachtin, or the 'people to come' of Deleuze and Guattari? Is it not in this neglected field that those desires and beliefs, those languages and forms from which to draw to continue believing in the world arise? The people of Rabelais exist where there is a popular culture; not simply one of folkloristic roots but rather a renewed culture, which appropriates technologies and forms, revitalizes them with cooperation, contamination and invention, a culture that becomes 'common'. Today, all of this is flowing through both the 'old' media (re-mediated television) and, increasingly, the new technologies of production and sharing.

LP Deleuze has not left us with the image of the people but of the 'people to come'. We should dwell on how the conception of heterogeneities is different from the people and how popular culture (and I agree with Tiziana on this) is different from populism. As Alberto Toscano points out in his interview, the idea of people, as for example invoked by Jodi Dean, is problematic because the communism that maintains this "people" is taken for granted.

Returning to Deleuze, the idea of people is perhaps referable to the idea of mass majority – therefore not of class nor of populism – but to the heterogeneity and complexity of the simplest unit. However, the ‘people to come’ is not a claim for a possible future, or one full of post-9/11 imagery (I am thinking of the TV series *Homeland* and of the representation of a new type of feminism as seen in the series *Borgen*). In short, it is not about establishing a new people by doing a work on ourselves that would take on the function of an infinite reflection or solipsistic loop on what we do; it is about inventing a speculative theoretical practice directed not-as-much to changing people’s condition, so that we can become people of the future, as to futurities that already exist in the people defined by an immanent thought.

On control

TT The strongest innovation of the past decade has undoubtedly been the becoming 'social' of digital media. Instead of the “semantic web” Tim Berners Lee spoke about, we have had the “social web” and it has been a genuine surprise to many. The network has exploded when the organization of communication has not mainly passed through the individual access to information but through social relations (friends, “followers”, “contacts” and so on...). Social networks begin with friends and acquaintances and expand very fast to an unknown but familiarly chained world of relations. A new layer of network communication is present today in social relations stressed by the all-present like, share, comment buttons as shown also by the proliferation of applications for smart phones. Thanks to its AdSense and AdWords program infiltrating the web, Google has paved the way followed by all the others. Referring to those processes we have two main dominant theories: the first is expressed by Jodi Dean and Bernard Stiegler where the problem is posed in terms of capture and decomposition of the impulse and desiring energy by communicative capitalism. Therefore desire is more or less completely captured by capitalism and transformed into profit, then deprived of its constituent capacity. Continuous communication results in a stalemate from the point of view of political organization. The second position is that of Assange and WikiLeaks: social communication has become the battleground for the new wars of information, where transparency

makes the act of dissenting visible to state and capital. The risk is to think of technology only as a tool of command to which we can only answer by returning to real life or through technical solutions (such as cryptography). This “cybernatization” of the social that has occurred so quickly (at the speed of the event we could say) seems to pose new questions or at least to open a new set of problems. First of all it is clear how it may create problems to a certain idea of society (a collectivity that dominates individuals and determines them through the mediation of representations) – revealing a wide dynamic flow, and asymmetrical relations capturing brain forces on which the techniques that you've identified in your question precisely act. At the beginning of the 20th century Gabriel Tarde said that Émile Durkheim had been able to conceive his society in these terms just because he had some rough statistics, and that in the future the quality and quantity of statistics would have revealed the complexity of the infinitely differentiated social continuum. Computer modeling of social networks today are already making obsolete those modelization based on power laws and highlighting on the determining influence of the supernodes which we had just been introduced to through network science in the early years of this decade. For sure the social relation and its fabric perceived as Tarde’s asymmetric net – which captures sub-representative and impersonal forces of the brain – are affected by such social cybernetics in ways we had not imagined. Confronted with this phenomenon we do not have to yield to the power of technique but we have to study, understand, take action and experiment. For example the phenomenon of Facebook pages that in a short time can catalyze big masses and bring them in the streets for huge events is impressive and lends itself to manipulation (who started these pages? It is easy to understand what the feelings that run the network are and to catalyze them in a series of keywords) but on the other hand it asks to become something more continuous in time, to find places and physical opportunities to precipitate in complex relationships.

LP Returning to the question of technology, my impression is that critical thinking fought back technology, the machines and the system of communication based on information, because they are seen as instruments of power, as the embodiment of instrumental reason of the power. This critical position, which tries to answer to what the political governmental conditions of technology are, inevitably refers to a call to the political entity

that is, however, capable of dividing the real by the artificial. The criticism of the technology still seems to be divided in two factions. On the one hand, an instrumental acceptance of it, as if technology were the arm and mind of a manipulation that people long for because "victims" of their desire to repression. On the other hand, a conception of technology as [an expression of] potential political subject that is surrounded by machinic ecology. The latter has been demonized because it is too close to and apologetic of a kind of capitalism that wants to forget the true value of the exploitation: work (in all its cognitive, affective, pro-creative forms). However to this position, at least, applies the bold statement that technology is not a tool of power, but a means of identifying energy. The society of control that Deleuze foresaw is linked to a profound change of cybernetics, which also became constitutive of the social. Especially the passage from the principle of communication – defined by Shannon as the use of entropy for the transmission of a signal through a channel capable of modulating hence funneling the energy potential – to the cybernetic principle of feedback (in its formulation of negative and positive feedback), marked, it seems, a managerial capacity to not only penetrate but also construct the social. Before the rise of social media the problem of marketing was defined by molar messages, robust axioms which reflected the social conditions. With the diffusion of the cybernetic interactive paradigm – exploded with social media – the problem of reflecting a pre-existing social sphere has been replaced by a computing that is constructive of the social. This is, perhaps, the most difficult point to grasp. The social sphere is not captured by the mechanical thinking of technocratic rationality; or, as Gilbert Simondon puts it in *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, it is not the machine that holds power. Instead, what many see as a new regime of clarity and transparency defined by the datafication of all kind of experiences, does not just symbolize power, but it also reveals the power hidden behind the call for the political liberation from the bureaucratic machine. The information machine at work here reveals that, in fact, such electronic documentation is a way to unveil the architecture of power that does not trust the human political subject to avoid forming mafie and falling into the intrigues of favoritism and injustice. This is not to declare a kind of Machiavellianism of information; I just want to suggest that this sort of political manipulation needs thorough exploration, decomposition and enquiry from the perspective of information architecture. The new regime of information does not build upon

the idea of public opinion or of a communication structure based on pre-determined probability. The bespoke new regime is based instead on an interactive paradigm, not only the meta-data, but also, and more deeply, an articulation of 'evil' computational media. As a consequence an immediate technocracy cannot be ascribed to technology precisely because the interactive paradigm brings into play what was considered non-calculable: the quality of lived expression – the quality of lived life. In this context, the introduction of the uncomputable to the rational calculation of value should not be underestimated. That is why the tension energy—information gains a new facet to then be used in the analysis of politics. We no longer live in a Laplacian universe where everything returns – or must be returned – to the primary conditions of measurement. It is not even that the social is insostituibile a priori and eternally topological, that is transformative, and therefore able to escape the representative constraints of the algorithm. What I believe we need in fact to consider is exactly the nature of this mechanical thinking or mechanical reason in the foundation of social realities. For Deleuze and Guattari, the mechanism of thought was expressed in that very principle of computational communication from which the marketing strategies you describe in your question assume their viral and memetic qualities, that bring together the masses (as Canetti precisely wrote about) through the energetic modulation of feeling. During the last decade there has been much talk of the cyber-operation of capturing and enhancing affectivity (both in the discourse on marketing and on security). What I understood by studying theories of information and computation is that the much antagonized uniqueness between information and energy – crucial to interactive cybernetics – perhaps can no longer be criticized through a principle of continuous differentiation for which control fails to capture the social energy of all (live or not) beings. We must instead acknowledge a dynamic reality of information which adds to the energetic dynamicity, while not being on the same level. This is not a difference of levels, but an asymmetry or an ontological cut for which parts of the real do not merge into the unit but proliferate asymmetrically, so that there can be no direct contact – between algorithms and affection – dependent on the totalizing ability of one or the other. The question of the interactive algorithm does not simply correspond to the idea that today's social is pre-formed. What we have learned from interactive algorithms (from online trading to informational marketing) is that the computational principle they operate includes a new kind of mechanization or

automation that does not contain but rather generate data, does not limit but regenerates potential and reduces the uncomputable to an effective probability. To fully grasp this type of control there is need to rethink the type of automation that we are experiencing and to then explore the informatic social sphere beyond a tout court critique of cybernetics.

ELEVENTH OF DECEMBER 2013



On micro-fascism

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See the middle section for all the questions.

I believe that macropolitical reflections, as Wu Ming's one, and the micropolitical analysis should be carried out separately. They should be considered, at least theoretically, as different structures, each having its own categories and inner organization. Wu Ming's thoughts and of others after them – ideas expressed for instance in a recent text by Alessandro Dal Lago, *Clic. Grillo, Casaleggio e la demagogia elettronica* – look at what is evident, therefore using the same categories of ordinary political debate; they reflect on the global and visible distribution of consent as it is emblematically reproduced by the general election. On the other hand, a micro political analysis ignores global tendencies, since it turns its attention to trends that are not visible straightaway, often they are unconscious, and they cut through the entire social field, giving a different insight to the one emerging from ordinary political discourse. For this reason, it is essential to identify those micro-fascist instances that are to be found across Italian society, precisely because they are found where they should not be, according to the macropolitical analysis. I would answer the question on authoritarianism and the one on micro-fascism separately.

It is crucial to understand authoritarianism as a systemic factor, rather than as a local and contingent tendency. It is the government's device of European countries, and not a single party or movement's strategy; austerity policies, privatisation, cuts to social and cultural spending and so forth are authoritarian,

because were largely imposed by governments without popular legitimacy. Greece and Italy are symbolic examples, but even in France the situation is not much different. To be brief, traditional left and right political parties carry out the same kind of economic policies, which therefore stay the same despite the electoral alternation. In my opinion, this is why anti-system political movements emerged in Greece, Italy and France. A significant slice of these movements belongs to the far-right mainly for two reasons: first the almost total lack of any reliable alternative system, and secondly in times of economic and psychic crisis – the only way out relies on unconscious paranoid investments, which result into reactionary or, at worst, suicidal outcomes.

To my understanding, micro-fascisms are due precisely to paranoid–reactionary investments. This means something very simple: when facing an issue of the current state of affairs, a challenge involving a change in self habits, categories and established practices one does not play along, trying solutions or possible mediations but rather one withdraws into oneself feeling trapped. This paranoid attitude is a psychological, an economic and political action; in any case, it stands for a profound weakness. Two examples of this attitude are: the closure of borders to face migration, and the proposal of leaving the Euro to deal with the problems of the single currency's imbalances and global competition; the latter resembles the “exit” from the world market which was advocated by fascist ideologies. It goes without saying that on a political level nationalism is a key ingredient of micro-fascisms.

Considering this as the current state of affairs, it is easy to spot micro-fascist instances at every corner, from the far-right to the far-left and passing through the hybrid movements, such as the Lega Nord and the 5SM, albeit they are very different from each other.

1919, 1933, 2013. On the crisis

The current crisis refers to a variety of distinct phenomena. One is the global economic crisis that erupted in 2008, from which most of the developed countries recovered and that can be seen as one of the many cyclical crises involving the history of capitalism. Another phenomenon was defined correctly as a permanent crisis, a crisis that identify with a profound transformation of capitalism,

which can be summarised by the formula ‘become profit income’: in response to the tendency of profit rate to fall – due to partially different mechanisms from those analysed by Marx – current capitalism performs a kind of valorisation taking place outside the production processes, the financial turn. This leads to a self-governing capital, independent from social and political dynamics (such as the debates on the surplus value production i.e. labour, and the institutional mediations), as well as to the establishment of a limited number of private interests, which are able to change the future of global economy.

Finally, a further phenomenon is the crisis affecting Europe, and perhaps within this crisis there is another one affecting Italy only. The latter was caused by a static society, nepotism and endemic tax evasion... this is the Italian typical situation and it does not need to be discussed about. The European problem may be more interesting, since it is a political experiment that cannot be compared to any previous models, and the failure of such experiment could lead to catastrophic results. For example, if the European Union was born to prevent the return to the conditions that led to two World Wars, one could argue that its dissolution is likely to make those precise conditions happen again. Finally, I believe Europe to be a fertile territory for the fascist instances previously discussed. In short: newly born national movements in Europe are claiming the exit of their countries from Euro, because Europe is surely determined by the neo-liberal policies for cutting social spending, privatisation, precarious labour and life, low wages... Under this light, to oppose European economic policies is not a reactionary action. Moreover, in addition to this first element there is a second equally important aspect: the national strategy that the German economic policy is using to increase its supremacy in Europe.

I have no answers to the question on how to escape the crisis. If it is true that populist and reactionary nationalisms are symptomatic of a widespread impotent attitude in front of the authoritarian policies enacted by European governments during the crisis – a consequence of the current transformation of capitalism which I mentioned before – then the only option we have is to fight it wherever possible; to try to open spaces to encourage participation and democratic decisions. Governments’ reactionary investments are defeated only by real changes.

Social-democratic policies based on redistribution of wealth have always been a sort of asymmetric mediation: they allowed

to maintain the structural inequality of wealth and power between social classes, while nevertheless pretending that the lower classes would reach better living and working conditions... During the second

93 From the Italian term 'Giustizialista': the attitude of those who feel the need of a severe, often quick and hasty justice, especially for crimes committed by politicians.

half of the 20th century, many social struggles made use of this very mediation. Even when they had radical ambitions, welfare was the territory in which to enact these struggles. What changed with the financial turn of the economy is that States are no longer able to govern the distribution of wealth. Therefore our challenge is to invent tools able to appropriate the wealth produced by social cooperation, but which at the moment is entirely absorbed by financial systems. If in 20th century capitalism the relation appropriation-distribution was largely controlled by the States – and in fact it was possible to demand a more equal distribution which followed appropriate wealth, according to the slightly banal scheme elaborated by Carl Schmitt – today the problem is to create a collective; a Non-State power to act directly and immediately on the appropriation of wealth, capable of re-socialise what finance privatised.

On the organisation

I would not underestimate the 5SM phenomenon; however, it seems to be a catalyst that collected, concentrated and sped up reactions that were already happening, rather than a war machine. To a certain extent, Grillo does not add anything new to the political debate – except some issues related to innovation in the green economy perhaps, which unsurprisingly did not determine their electoral success. For example, anti-caste instances have been largely considered by the justicialist⁹³ left propaganda over the last two decades. The opposition to the *jus soli* was and still is a strong point of Lega Nord's programme, and generally of the Italian right. The opposition to European economic policies is shared by the entire political spectrum. The 5SM's real innovation was to bring common people into the Parliament. I believe this to be a positive factor – especially at a time when democracy seems to be overly determined by economic techniques.

Also, I do not see as relevant the innovations of the 5SM's organisation: their communication tools and modes can only

appear to be new to a political class which grew up before the computer era. Finally, a charismatic leader such as Grillo does not represent as a big news in an era when politicians are asked to be able to communicate in an immediate and affective way.

The comments in Grillo's blog are different, and they manifest certainly a pure moral and social dissatisfaction: a paranoid and self-referential delirium found in many similar cases – Raffaele Donnarumma wrote about this issue in *Le parole e le cose*. Even this delirium is not surprising, because it is almost impossible to avoid it: the only antidote to these phenomena is a collective discussion, a shared vocabulary and a common project which would allow anger and despair to not be individual issues anymore.

To conclude, the 5SM shares two underlying limits with traditional political forces that prevent it from effectively undermining the aforementioned authoritarianism: a virtual organisation that produces mass demonstrations as one off events – a similar issue to that of anti-globalisation movements – and the obtuse or opportunistic faith in representative democracy.

On tidal waves

I am not convinced by Bifo's hope in the coming defeat of neo-liberal Europe. Almost a year after the general election, it is now clear that the unexpected and confusing success of the 5SM has turned into a conservative coalition.

A key moment in the recent Italian political history was the election of the President of the Italian Republic. Not only because the re-election of a very old president highlights the worsening of the Italian situation, but also because Napolitano was chosen to be the president as a sort of defence against Stefano Rodotà's nomination. Albeit the on-line voting system of the 5SM was a fake representative method, it is significant that most preferences fell on a politician and an intellectual, Stefano Rodotà, who had nothing to do with the populism, demagogy and justicialism that characterised the movement. One could argue that this was one of Grillo's smart moves; yet it was not his idea, and as it happened with Romano Prodi, Rodotà's nomination shed light on the possible contrasts inside the *Democratic Party*. This nomination was welcomed also by other areas, hence its failure caused profound bitterness.

Finally, I do not think that the 5SM's electoral success is particularly striking. At the end of the day, it was the movement who better embodied a position of the new political landscape: that is, the opposition to authoritarian policies of austerity, and the rejection of conservative politics.

On the missing people

I dislike the term 'populism'. I fully agree with Jacques Rancière when, in an article published on *Libération*, he showed how the notion of populism is a device for constructing a certain image of 'the people', namely the image of ignorant masses, who follow their own basic instincts and are carried away by the most demagogic figures. Whoever uses the term populism should be affirm the necessity of an anti-democratic government of élites. Nobody claims this to be a political principle, since it would be 'wrong'; however, this is what happens in our representative oligarchies. There is only one kind of anti-populist rhetoric: a total subjection to the government of élites, since only those can prevent the totalitarian drift of any anarchic situation.

Obviously 'the people' are neither good nor bad, for, as Rancière argues, 'the people' do not exist. 'The people' as a single entity or as a mass unified by some sort of principle or tendency do not exist; however 'many people' do exist in one population, and besides there are many pictures of what 'people' might be. As a consequence, the term 'people' must be abandoned and must be replaced by 'multitude'. Whatever political jargon one may use, the concept of populism has its precise governmental function in creating the image of people unified by their most brutal tendencies, thus to subject them to the rationality of economics and political representation. Accepting the consequences of this concept of populism diminishes the chances of real democratic policies, if not of a revolt or a revolution.

As Deleuze repeats after Klee, the fact that the concept of 'the people' is missing means that every political invention, together with every artistic one, addresses 'the people to come'. In other words, it demands the creation of new concept of people. Perhaps, to oppose the use of the notion of populism means to refer to a new image of 'the people'.

On control

It is obvious that marketing plays a central role in contemporary society: it directs and produces social practices and lifestyles. The links of current power are much more complicated than they were at the time of industrial capitalism and disciplinary society. However, the principle of political domain as never entirely master of its means still holds true: to consider the control apparatus as omnipotent certainly leads to impotence, and it does not encourage escape routes or new weapons for the revolt.

When Rancière refers to the end of politics, he is not appropriating this diagnosis: he is saying that there is a dominant discursive regime that aims at getting rid of politics, and it is made of radical dissent, social conflict, egalitarian utopia and the idea of a new common life; furthermore, this discursive regime cannot be separated from pure technical politics that is ordinary and rational management separated from the toxic ideas of those who sees politics as a rupture of the establishment and dissent. In particular, the latter has a partial quality: in a specific time and space a novel political entity emerges to organise the revolt. Like all events, the political ones have a great margin of uncertainty: it is almost impossible to produce them in a voluntary way. Yet it possible to carefully look for those very small displacements, anxieties and micro-fractures that occur constantly and that could come together following uncertain reasons.

In the Deleuze's text you mentioned, modern-day capitalism is said to no longer depend on production but rather on the product, on sales and on the market; moreover, the subaltern subject is said to no longer be the neither the confined man nor the exploited worker, but the indebted man. Such analyses follow the same direction as the aforementioned profit income. It is the same process of transformation of capitalism, which corresponds with the transformation of work and production – growth of social cooperation, immaterial production, harassing life, affections and so on – and which corresponds with a transformation of the political strategies of conflict.

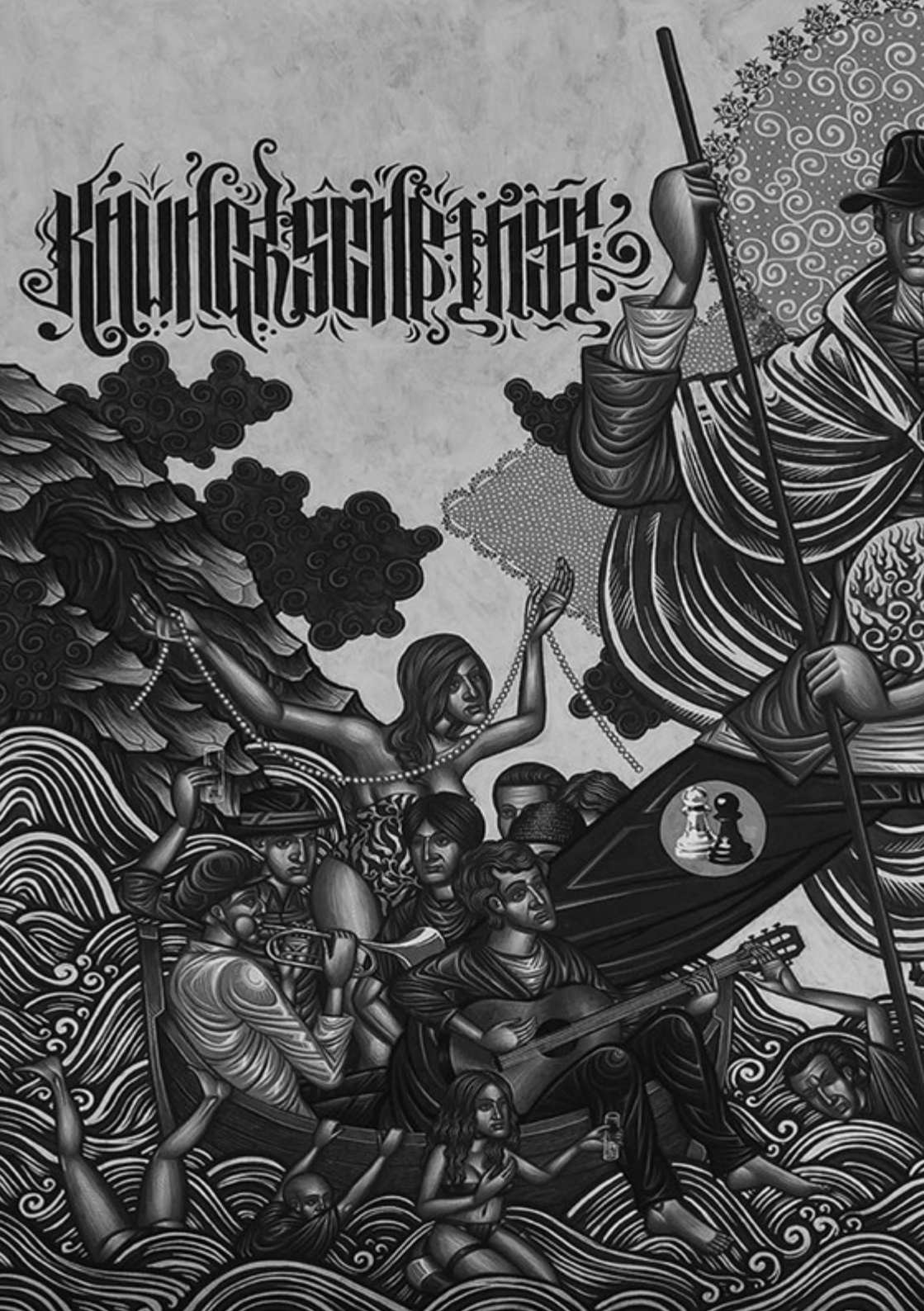
We need to go a step forward. It is not about extending the logic of a collision between power and counter-powers, nor about reversing a model suggesting, as some Italian post-workmen theorists do, that capitalist restorations respond to those innovations brought by social cooperation and class conflict. It

is about acknowledging, as Marx did, that capitalist development awoke social, technological, productive and inventive forces that no other social movement had produced. As well as it is necessary to understand that the very same capitalist development enhancing those powers does everything possible to hold them back, subject them to a short-sighted, destructive logic, producing an immense wealth alongside an immense misery. This double step is needed to escape the neo-liberal trap: to be fully contemporary to our time and welcome capitalist modernity while understanding that the current phase of capitalism may be the basis for the emergence of a post-capitalist society. One must be able to be on top of her / his time to be able to overcome it. In this spirit, I completely agree with what Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams wrote in their *Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*.

TWENTY-FOURTH OF JANUARY 2014



Культурный мейнстрим



THE GREAT ESCAPE



ON MICRO-FASCISM

Let us start from the analysis Wu Ming set out in their brief essay Grillismo: yet another right-wing cult coming from Italy and which interprets Grillo's *Five Star Movement* (5MS) as a new authoritarian right-wing faction. Why did the desire for change of much of the electorate long once again for its very repression? We seem to witness the re-affirmation of Wilhelm Reich's thought: at a given moment in history the masses wanted fascism. The masses have not been deceived: they have understood very well the danger of authoritarianism; but they have voted it anyway.* Even more worrying is that Berlusconi's authoritarian *Freedom People* (PDL) and Grillo's *Five Star Movement* conquer more than half of the Italian electorate together. A very similar situation arose in the UK in May 2013, with the exploit of UKIP in the latest local elections. Why and in what measure are the toxins of authoritarianism and micro-fascism present in contemporary European society?†

* G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). An in-depth analysis of the relationship between the desire of the masses, micro-fascism and the organisation of power is advanced in the *plateaux* '1933. Micropolitics and segmentarity'.

† G. Deleuze, 'Intellectuals and power', a conversation with Michel Foucault dating to March 4, 1972 and published by *L'Arc*, #49, 1972: 'There is no denying that our social system is totally without tolerance; this accounts for its extreme fragility in all its aspects and also its need for a global form of repression.'

In 2013 Slavoj Žižek said that when the normal run of things is traumatically interrupted, the field is open for a 'discursive' ideological competition. In Germany in the early thirties Hitler won the competition to determine which narrative would explain the reasons for the crisis of the Weimar Republic:† the Jewish conspiracy and the corruption of political parties. Žižek ends his reflection by stating that the expectations of the radical left to get scope for action and gain consent may be deceptive as populist or racist formations will prevail: the Greek *Golden Dawn*, the Hungarian *Fidesz*, the French *Front National*, the UKIP are examples. Italy has had farcical groups such as the *Lega Nord* or the recent *Five Star Movement*, a bizarre *rassemblement* seemingly combining Reverend Jones' Peoples Temple with Syriza, or revolutionary boyscoutism with the disciplinarianism of the *control societies*. How can one escape the crisis? What discursive, possibly-winning narratives should be developed? Are the typically English neo-Keynesian politics an answer or, on the contrary, is it the new authoritarian populism that will prevail?

† Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, then as Farce* (Verso, 2009) p. 17.

ON THE MISSING PEOPLE

Mario Tronti states that we have populism because there is no people. An enduring theme, that of populism, which Tronti disclaims in an Italian way: *'Great political forces used to stand firmly on the popular components of social history: the Catholic populism, the Socialist tradition, the diversity in Communism. There was people, not populism.'* Paul Klee often complained that even in historical artistic avant-gardes 'a people was lacking.'[§] However the radical critique to populism has led to important results: the birth of a mature democracy in America; the rise of the theory and practice of revolution in the Tsarist Empire, a country plagued by the contradictions of a capitalist development in an underdeveloped territory. Tronti carries on in his tranchant analysis of Italian society: *'In today's populism, there is no people and there is no prince. It is necessary to beat populism because it obscures the relations of power.'* Through its economic mediatic apparatuses, neopopulism creates trust-worthy people, remindful of the customers portfolio of the branded world of neo-liberal economy: Berlusconi's people followed its deeds for twenty years. Grillo's followers are adopting similar all-encompassing identifying processes, giving birth to the wildest impulses of Italian society. With institutional fragility, fluctuating sovereignties and the oblivion of left wing fundamentals, how can we form *people* today? Is it possible to reinvent an anti-authoritarian *people*? Is it just *people* to lack or is politics missing too?[¶]

§ Paul Klee, *Diari 1898-1918. La vita, la pittura, l'amore: un maestro del Novecento si racconta* (Net, 2004). [← ITALIAN TEXT ONLY]

¶ On the missing people and the relationship between art – especially Paul Klee – and territory, rhythm and mecanosphere, see the plateaux '1837. On the refrain' in G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980)

ON THE ORGANISATION

In his La Peste brune** Daniel Guérin argues that the conquest of Hitler's power in Germany in 1933 occurred primarily due to micro-organizations giving him 'an unequaled, irreplaceable ability to penetrate every cell of society.'† The movement of Grillo has branched into society thanks to the territorial formula of meet-ups borrowed directly from the American politician Howard Dean.** However 5SM is even different from the *MeetUp*: is it possible to propose an analysis of its escalation as a new energy carrier in swirling mutation – 'the absolute motion' of the Grillo-machine, as Félix Guattari would call it? What segments, threads, streams, leaps and heterodoxies make up Grillo's abstract war machine?§§

** Daniel Guérin, *The Brown Plague* (DUP, 1994).

†† G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A thousand plateaus* (1980) 9th plateaux, '1933. Micropolitics and segmentarity': *Daniel Guérin* (La peste brune, 1933) is correct to say that if Hitler took power, rather than taking over the German State administration, it was because from the beginning he had at his disposal microorganizations giving him 'an unequaled, irreplaceable ability to penetrate every cell of society,' in other words, a molecular and supple segmentarity, flows capable of suffusing every kind of cell.

‡‡ Gary Wolf, 'How the Internet Invented Howard Dean', *Wired* (January 2004).

§§ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A thousand plateaus*, 15th plateaux, Concrete Rules and Abstract Machines: *A movement is absolute when, whatever its quantity and speed, it relates 'a' body ['un' corps] considered as multiple to a smooth space that it occupies in the manner of a vortex.*

ON TIDAL WAVES

Franco Bifo Berardi wrote on MicroMega^{¶¶} that the defeat of liberist anti-Europe begins in Italy with the last general election. According to him Italians would have said: 'We will not pay the debt': insolvency. According to your point of view, what happened in Italy on February 24th, 2013? Gianluca Passarelli conducted an electoral study for Istituto Cattaneo that showed how the Five Star Movement electoral datum was the most homogeneous in terms of votes on the whole national territory. The party nationalization, defined as the extent to which parties compete with similar strength across subnational geographic units, obtained a score of 0.9 out of 1, more than the PDL (0.889) and the left-wing Democratic Party (0.881). How could it happen?^{*} How could a newly-born movement not only compete with, but even beat well-established voting machines such as the ones of Berlusconi and of the organized left?**

¶¶ **Franco Berardi**, 'La sconfitta dell'anti-Europa liberista comincia in Italia', *Micromega*, 27 Febbraio 2013. [← ITALIAN TEXT ONLY]

*** **G. Deleuze, F. Guattari**, *A thousand plateaux*, (1980)

ON CONTROL

In Postscript on the Societies of Control, published in 1990, Gilles Deleuze states that, thanks to the illuminating analyses of Michel Foucault, a new diagnosis of contemporary Western society emerges. Deleuze's analysis is as follows: control societies have replaced disciplinary societies at the beginning of the 20th century. He writes that 'marketing is now the instrument of social control and it forms the impudent breed of our masters.' Let us evaluate who stands beyond two very successful electoral adventures such as *Forza Italia*, Berlusconi's first party, and 5SM: respectively Publitalia 80 owned by Marcello Dell'Utri and Casaleggio Associati owned by Gianroberto Casaleggio. Such an incontrovertible fact reinforces Deleuze's analysis. Mechanisms of control, media events such as *exit polls* and *surveys*, *data as commodity*, im/penetrable databases, continuous *spin-doctoring*, *influencers* that lead consensus on the net, opaque *bots*, digital squads, dominant *echo-chambering*. Evil media. These are the determinations of post-ideological, post-democratic neo-liberalism.^{†††} The misery of the new control techniques competes only with that of the glass house of *Grillina* transparency: web control, of course. Jacques Rancière says we live in the epoch of post-politics: how to get out of the neo-liberal cage and free ourselves from the ideological consensus of its electoral products?^{††††} What will the reconfiguration of left-wing politics be after the exhaustion of Marxist hegemony?

††† Saul Newman, 'Politics in the Age of Control', in *Deleuze and New Technology* edited by M. Poster, D. Savat (Edinburgh University Press, 2009) p. 104—122.

†††† Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy* (UMP, 2004).

ON THE *GOOGLIZATION* OF POLITICS; THE FINANCIAL SIDE OF DIGITAL POPULISM

The early 21st century has been characterized by the rise of neo-capitalism, referred to as cognitive; in this context a company like Google has established itself as the perfect synthesis of web-business as it does not compensate, if not in a small part, the content-carriers it lists. Following the electoral success of the 5SM, Italy witnessed a mutation of the typical social media user: the new figure of the prosumer-voter was in fact born on Grillo's blog, essentially the one and only channel of information for the 5SM. The blog is a commercial activity and the high number of contacts and daily access has steadily increased in the last year. This digital militancy produces incomes both in the form of advertising and online sales of products such as DVDs, books and other material associated with the movement. This leads to the risk of Googlization of politics whereby the modes of financing political activity radically change because of the network surplus-value:^{§§§} an expression coined by the researcher Matteo Pasquinelli to define that portion of incomes extracted from the practices of the web prosumers. Are we about to witness a shift of the financial paradigm applied to politics? Will the exploitation of the prosumer-voters with online micro-donations in the style of Obama replace fundings from powerful lobbies or the general public? If so, will the dominant Googlization of politics involve any particular risks?^{¶¶¶}

§§§ Matteo Pasquinelli, 'Google's PageRank Algorithm: A Diagram of Cognitive Capitalism and the Rentier of the Common Intellect', in K. Becker, F. Stalder, *Deep Search* (London: 2009).

¶¶¶ The path linking *cheap computing* to the current Google-dominated economy of *cheap searching* is analysed by Nicholas Carr, *The Big Switch: Rewiring the World, from Edison to Google* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008).

ON DIGITAL POPULISM,
ON AFFECTIVE CAPITALISM

James Ballard once said that after the religions of the Book we should expect those of the Web. Some claim that, in fact, a first techno-religion already exists in the form of Affective Capitalism the technological and communicative characteristics of which mirror those of network cultures. This notion of a secularized cult can be traced back to Walter Benjamin's thought, but is enriched by a very contemporary mix of affective manipulation techniques, politics of neo-liberalism and political practices 2.0. The rise of the 5SM is the first successful example of Italian digital populism; Obama's campaign in the USA has witnessed an evolution of micro-targeting techniques: customized political offers via the web. The new frontier of both medical and economic research is producing a disturbing convergence of evolving fields of knowledges: control theories, neuro-economics and neuro-marketing.^{****} In the optic of the war-repression schema, Foucault entitled his 1976 course at the Collège de France Society must be defended.^{†††} Faced with the general friability of all of us, how can we defend ourselves from the impact of affective capitalism and its digital practices? Can we put forward a differential, local knowledge which, as Foucault said, '*owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it*'?^{††††}

**** Tony D. Sampson, *Virality* (UMP, 2012).

†††† Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975—76* (Saint Martin Press, 2003).

†††† Michel Foucault, *Ibid.*, 'Lecture of January 7, 1976'

Chronology of the project

Creation of the blog <i>Obsolete Capitalism</i>	DEC 2012
Italian general elections: 5SM wins	FEB 2013
Write up of the questions of <i>Birth of digital populism</i>	MAR 2013
Early selection and management of the interviewees	APR 2013
UK local elections: UKIP wins	MAY 2013
Interview with Jussi Parikka	MAY 2013
– " ———— Saul Newman	JUN 2013
– " ———— Tony D. Sampson	JUN 2013
– " ———— Simon Choat	JUN 2013
Interviews' publication begins (IT & EN) on the blog <i>Obsolete Capitalism</i>	SEP 2013
Interview with Alberto Toscano	NOV 2013
– " ———— Lapo Berti	NOV 2013
– " ———— Luciana Parisi, Tiziana Terranova	DEC 2013
Writing of the <u>introduction</u> to <i>Birth of digital populism</i>	JAN 2014
Interview with Alberto Toscano	JAN 2014
<u>Introduction's</u> publication begins (IT) on the blog <i>Obsolete Capitalism</i>	MAR 2014
Interviews' publication ends (IT & EN) on the blog <i>Obsolete Capitalism</i>	MAY 2014
Completed <u>introduction</u> (IT) to <i>Birth of digital populism</i>	MAY 2014
<u>Introduction's</u> publication ends (IT) on the blog <i>Obsolete Capitalism</i>	MAY 2014
<u>Introduction's</u> translation to english and final book editing	AUG 2014
Publication (IT, 1.0) on <i>issuu</i> of the book <i>Nascita del populismo digitale. Masse, potere e post democrazia nel XXI secolo</i>	SEP 2014
<u>Introduction's</u> publication begins (EN) on the blog <i>Obsolete Capitalism</i>	SEP 2014



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