Abstract

In the forthcoming future I do not see any predictable form of subjectivation, of resurrection of consciousness and emancipation: the social civilization is over, the Neoliberal precarization of labor and the media dictatorship have destroyed the cultural antibodies that in the past made resistance possible. As far as I know. But what I know is only what I can see from my limited point of observation. The limitations of knowledge present the only potential for ethical imagination in the present age of catastrophe.

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In the 20th century the moral revolt against exploitation was based on the realistic prospect of winning the autonomy of society from the cultural and economic domination of capitalism. This was a realistic approach based on the analysis of actual lived and material conditions. But during the last decades I have witnessed a mutation of possibility induced by the shifts in capitalist economy, and I have come to think that this mutation is irreversible: not only has it affected the social sphere but also the semiotic, biological and psychic spheres. Therefore, my knowledge and my understanding cause me to disown the possibility of an alternative society.

The dissociation of capitalism and modernity is accomplished: capitalist rule is liquidating modern civilization. Humanism, enlightenment, socialism and the cultural regulators of modern democracy have been swept away by the forms of cultural, economic and social deregulation that is implied in capital’s final assault. The privatization of every living space and activity and the spread of competition and economic brutality through the social sphere have deeply affected the self-perception of the social body. In my knowledge and my

understanding this process seems now inevitable and irreversible. Not only has it destroyed the structures of social civilization that modernity created, it has also jeopardized the affective fabric of the social environment and reprogrammed the cultural expectations of the new generation.

My knowledge and my understanding do not show the possibility of any acceptable development out of the present catastrophe. But catastrophe, a word whose etymology stems from the Greek Kata (for “moving”) and Strophein, (for “beyond”), is exactly the point where we “move beyond” the present and a new landscape is revealed. I do not see that landscape because my knowledge and my understanding are limited, and the limits of my language are the limits of my world. My knowledge and understanding are missing the event, the singularity that might open onto that new landscape.

So I must act “as if.”

As if the forces of labor and knowledge may overcome the forces of greed. As if the cognitive workers may overcome the fractalization of their life and intelligence. I must resist simply because I cannot know what is happening after the future, and I must preserve the consciousness and sensibility of social solidarity, of human empathy, of gratuitous activity, of freedom, equality and fraternity. Just in case, right?

We don’t know what is going to happen next, in the empty space that comes after the future of modernity. I must continue to resist because this is the only way to be in peace with myself. In the name of self-love, we must resist. And self-love (by which I mean loving myself (and by extension others) as a social, cooperating, laboring, loving body) is the basic ethical rule that I prize, and which capitalism does not.

Our present ignorance of what might come has to be seen as the space of a possibility. We have to start from the ignorance of the general intellect. The force of our collective intelligence in boundless. Theoretically. But it lacks any consciousness of itself. Intelligence without self-consciousness. I am talking of the self-consciousness of the general intellect, millions and millions of people worldwide producing the info-flow that makes the planet go around.

Creating a form of self-consciousness of the general intellect is the political task of the future. And it is not only political, but philosophical, epistemological, and, in the end, therapeutic. Poetry and therapy (thera-poetry) will be the forces leading to the creation of a cognitarian self-consciousness: not a political party,
not the organization of interests, but the reactivation of the cognitarian sensibility. The ignorance of the general intellect is the starting point.

Why are the cognitarians weak, disunited and unable to assert their rights as laborers, and their knowledge as researchers? Because they live in a dimidiated form: their collective brain is detached from their collective body; their communication is less and less a conjunction of minds and bodies and more and more a connection of frozen digitalized fragments. The new space of activism is here, in the meeting point of poetry and theory and creation of new paradigms.

Our knowledge and understanding are unable to grasp the singularity which is around the corner. Only radical imagination can do it. What is imagination? I would say that imagination is the cognitive faculty which recombines the contents of our memory and of our experience in a creative way. Radical imagination today essentially means imagination free from the blackmail of the economy, free from the epistemological domination of economics.

The global collapse of September 2008 marks the impossibility of a new start inside the frame of economic thought. Throughout the history of civilization perception has been molded by artificial regimes of images and techniques of representation. Through digital technology the image begins to proliferate vertiginously and our faculty of imagination undergoes rapid acceleration. The image is not the mere perception of empirical data brought to our visual attention by material reality: it is rather the effect of a semi-conscious elaboration within our minds as the image mingles with our previous experiences, our hopes, fears and desires. As a result the social, historical and technical mode in which we receive and elaborate images acts upon the formation of the imaginary. The imaginary in turn shapes the imagination, the activity whereby we produce images and imaginary worlds, which precedes us being able to bring those into being in real life. The repertoire of images at our disposal limits, exalts, amplifies or circumscribes the forms of life and events that, through our imagination, we can project onto the world, put into being, build and inhabit. Techno-communicative and psycho-cognitive mutations are as interdependent as organisms and their ecosystems. The conscious organism is also a sensuous organism, a bundle of sensitive receptors. We become thinking, imagining, social and cooperative beings not only through thought but also through sensing and feeling.

The world we inhabit today looks like the projection of fragments, images of various origin that we combine in various sequences. Therefore, the nucleus of personal identity is fleeing and dissolving in all directions. Radical imagination is the ability to recombine the contents of our experience of exploitation, of
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