

Crowd, Power and Postdemocracy in the 21st Century

This document collects all the interviews that originated from the ***Crowd, Power and Postdemocracy in the 21st Century*** project, published between May 2013 and January 2014 by [Obsolete Capitalism](#) and [Rizomatika](#) - and the respective translations into Italian or English. These texts are covered by a Creative Commons License and you not only may but **should** copy, distribute, display, remix or enact them and make works based on it, as long as the original authors and interviewees are credited. Obsolete Capitalism collective is formed by Paolo Davoli, Letizia Rustichelli and Francesco Tacchini (authors and translators). The English questions were supervised by Alberto Toscano; Terranova and Parisi's interviews were supervised directly by them. The interviewees are: Jussi Parikka, Saul Newman, Tony D. Sampson, Simon Choat, Alberto Toscano, Lapo Berti, Tiziana Terranova, Luciana Parisi and Paolo Godani. The interviews are listen in order of publication. Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova have preferred to be interviewed together.

Let's have a good read !

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Jussi Parikka's interview on digital populism and recent European political phenomena, held on **17th May 2013** with the author of *Obsolete Capitalism*

Crowd, Power and Post-democracy in the 21st Century

'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 desires its very own repression?"'

— Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

On the micro-fascism

Obsolete Capitalism 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 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 the authoritarian Berlusconi's Freedom People (PDL) and Grillo's Five Star Movement (M5S) conquer more than half of the Italian electorate together. A very similar situation arose in the UK in May 2013, with the UKIP's exploit in the latest local elections. Why and in what measure are the toxins of authoritarianism and micro-fascism present in contemporary European society?

Jussi Parikka 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

OC In 2008 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 1930s 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 UK Independence Party are examples. Italy has had farcical groups such as the Lega Nord or the recent Five Star Movement, a bizarre rassemblement that seems to combine Reverend Jones People's Temple with Syriza, or 'revolutionary boyscoutism' with the disciplinarianism of the societies of control. How can one escape the crisis? What discursive, possibly-winning narratives should be developed? Are the typically Anglo-Saxon neo-Keynesian politics an answer or, on the contrary, is it the new authoritarian populism that will prevail?

JP 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

OC Mario Tronti states that ‘there is populism because there is no people.’ That of the people is an enduring theme which Tronti disclaims in a very Italian way: ‘the great political forces use to stand firmly on the popular components of the social history: the Catholic populism, the socialist tradition, the diversity in communism. Since there was the people, there was no populism.’ Paul Klee often complained that even in historical artistic avant-gardes ‘it was people who were 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 the practice of revolution in the Tsarist Empire, a country plagued by the contradictions of a capitalist development in an underdeveloped territory (Lenin and bolshevism). Tronti carries on in his tranchant analysis of the Italian and European backgrounds: ‘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-judicial apparatuses, neopopulism constantly shapes "trust-worthy people" similar to the "customers portfolio" of the branded world of neoliberal economy: Berlusconi's "people" have been following the deeds of Arcore's Sultan for twenty years; Grillo's followers are adopting similar all-encompassing identifying processes, giving birth to the more confused impulses of the Italian social strata. With institutional fragility, fluctuating sovereignties and the oblivion of left-wing dogmas (class, status, conflict, solidarity, equality) how can we form people today? Is it possible to reinvent an anti-authoritarian people? Is it only the people or also politics itself that is lacking?

JP 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 don't think we should restrict ourselves with the language of "lack" like there would be an ideal sense of the political waiting for us to fulfill 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

OC 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 has emerged. Deleuze's analysis is as follows: control societies have replaced disciplinary societies at the beginning of the twentieth 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 M5S: respectively Publitalia 80 owned by Marcello Dell'Utri, and Casaleggio Associati owned by Gianroberto Casaleggio. The incontrovertible fact that two marketing companies stand behind these political

projects reinforces Deleuze's analysis. Mechanisms of control, media events such as exit polls and infinite surveys, im/penetrable databases, data as commodities, 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?) neoliberalism. The misery of the new control techniques competes only with that of the glass house of transparency (web-control, of course). Jacques Ranciere says we live in the epoch of post-politics: how can we 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?

JP 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 behavioral ways but on affective and cerebral too. Marketing creates milieus of behavior 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

OC The first decade of the 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. In Italy, following

the electoral success of the Five Star Movement we witnessed a mutation of the typical prosumer of social networks: the new figure of the “prosumer-voter” was in fact born on Grillo’s blog - being essentially the one and only channel of information of the movement. 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. All of 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. Having said this, are we about to witness a shift of the financial paradigm applied to politics? Will the fundings from powerful lobbies or the general public be replaced by micro-donations via web (in the style of Obama’s) and by the exploitation of the prosumer-voters? And if so, will the dominant 'googlization of politics' involve any particular risks?

JP 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

OC 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 whose technological and communicative characteristics 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 Five Stars Movement is the first successful example of italian digital populism; Obama's campaign in the U.S.A. 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 1976, in the optic of the

‘war-repression’ schema, Foucault entitled his course at the Collège de France ‘Society must be defended’. Now, 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’?

JP I don’t 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 does not matter if your message is anti-capitalist or just celebration of friend’s hipster photographs that were Instagrammed.

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.

Jussi Parikka, Finnish, is Reader in Media & Design at University of Southampton and is a well-known theorist of New Media at an international level. He is Adjunct Professor of Digital Culture Theory at University of Turku in Finland. Among his recent publications are: 'What is Media Archaeology?' (Polity: Cambridge, 2012); 'Insect Media: An Archaeology of Animals and Technology' (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2010) Posthumanities-series, 'Digital Contagions. A Media Archaeology of Computer Viruses' (Peter Lang: New York, 2007); and (with Erkki Huhtamo) 'Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications' (University of California Press, Los Angeles, 2011). He blogs at jussiparikka.net

Saul Newman's interview on digital populism and recent European political phenomena, held on **5th June 2013** with the author of **Obsolete Capitalism** and of **Rizomatika**.

Crowd, Power and Post-democracy in the 21st Century

"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 desires its very own repression?'" — Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus

On the micro-fascism

Obsolete Capitalism 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 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 the authoritarian Berlusconi's Freedom People (PDL) and Grillo's Five Star Movement (M5S) conquer more than half of the Italian electorate together. A very similar situation arose in the UK in May 2013, with the UKIP's exploit in the latest local elections. Why and in what measure are the toxins of authoritarianism and micro-fascism present in contemporary European society?

Saul Newman I'm not sure I entirely agree with the Wu Ming analysis of Grillo and the 5SM. I wouldn't 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 destabilize 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 which people project their frustration and anger at the political establishment. It is as much Occupy as it is UKIP – an odd, 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

OC In 2008 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 1930s 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 UK Independence Party are examples. Italy has had farcical groups such as the Lega Nord or the recent Five Star Movement, a bizarre rassemblement that seems to combine Reverend Jones People's Temple with Syriza, or ‘revolutionary boyscoutism’ with the disciplinarianism of the societies of control. How can one escape the crisis? What discursive, possibly-winning narratives should be developed? Are the typically Anglo-Saxon neo-Keynesian politics an answer or, on the contrary, is it the new authoritarian populism that will prevail?

SN 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 US) at least are not Keynesian or neo-Keynesian by any measure. No, what we see with austerity cuts is simply the latest guise of neoliberalism, 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

OC Mario Tronti states that ‘there is populism because there is no people.’ That of the people is an enduring theme which Tronti disclaims in a very Italian way: ‘the great political forces use to stand firmly on the popular components of the social history: the Catholic populism, the socialist tradition, the diversity in communism. Since there was the people, there was no populism.’ Paul Klee often complained that even in historical artistic avant-gardes ‘it was people who were 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 the practice of revolution in the Tsarist Empire, a country plagued by the contradictions of a capitalist development in an underdeveloped territory (Lenin and bolshevism). Tronti carries on in his tranchant analysis of the Italian and European backgrounds: ‘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-judicial apparatuses, neopopulism constantly shapes “trust-worthy people” similar to the “customers portfolio” of the branded world of neoliberal economy: Berlusconi’s “people” have been following the deeds of Arcore’s Sultan for twenty years; Grillo’s followers are adopting similar all-encompassing identifying processes, giving birth to the more confused impulses of the Italian social strata. With institutional fragility, fluctuating sovereignties and the oblivion of left-wing dogmas (class, status, conflict, solidarity, equality) how can we form people today? Is it possible to

reinvent an anti-authoritarian people? Is it only the people or also politics itself that is lacking?

SN 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

OC 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 has emerged. Deleuze's analysis is as follows: control societies have replaced disciplinary societies at the beginning of the twentieth 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 M5S: respectively Publitalia 80 owned by Marcello Dell'Utri, and Casaleggio Associati owned by Gianroberto Casaleggio. The incontrovertible fact that two marketing companies stand behind these political projects reinforces Deleuze's analysis. Mechanisms of control, media events such as exit polls and infinite surveys, im/penetrable databases, data as commodities, 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?) neoliberalism. The misery of the new control techniques competes only with that of the glass house of transparency (web-control, of course). Jacques Ranciere says we live in the epoch of post- politics: how can we 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?

SN There is no question that democratic politics, as practiced under the neoliberal 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 neoliberal 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 don’t 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 wouldn’t 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

OC The first decade of the 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. In Italy, following the electoral success of the Five Star Movement we witnessed a mutation of the typical prosumer of social networks: the new figure of the “prosumer-voter” was in fact born on Grillo’s blog - being essentially the one and only channel of information of the movement. 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. All of 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. Having said this, are we about to witness a shift of the financial paradigm applied to politics? Will the fundings from powerful lobbies or the general public be replaced by micro-donations via web (in the style of Obama’s) and by the exploitation of the prosumer-voters? And if so, will the dominant 'googlization of politics' involve any particular risks?

SN 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 neoliberal 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 neoliberalism, 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 neoliberal 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

OC 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 whose technological and communicative characteristics 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 Five Stars Movement is the first successful example of Italian digital populism; Obama's campaign in the U.S.A. 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 1976, in the optic of the 'war-repression' schema, Foucault entitled his course at the Collège de France

‘Society must be defended’. Now, 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’*?

SN The reference you make to Foucault is interesting, and perhaps it speaks to the way that behind neoliberalism 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 Boétie’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’.

Saul Newman, Australian, lives and works in London. He is Professor of Political Theory at Goldsmiths College, University of London (UK). He specialises in - and has 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: Manchester University Press, 2007); *'Politics Most Unusual: Violence, Sovereignty and Democracy in the 'War on Terror'* - Co-authored with Michael Levine and Damian Cox-(New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2009). *'The Politics of Post Anarchism'* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press: 2010); *'Max Stirner'* (Palgrave 2011) and *'Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights'* (co-authored with John Lechte) (Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

Tony D. Sampson's interview on digital populism and recent European political phenomena, held on **14th June 2013** with the author of **Obsolete Capitalism** and of **Rizomatika**.

Crowd, Power and Post-democracy in the 21st Century

'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 desires its very own repression?"'

On the micro-fascism

Obsolete Capitalism 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 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 the authoritarian Berlusconi's Freedom People (PDL) and Grillo's Five Star Movement (M5S) conquer more than half of the Italian electorate together. A very similar situation arose in the UK in May 2013, with the UKIP's exploit in the latest local elections. Why and in what measure are the toxins of authoritarianism and micro-fascism present in contemporary European society?

Tony D. Sampson 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 rightwing 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 demonizations 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 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 microsocial 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 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? So 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 etc, 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

OC In 2008 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 1930s 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 UK Independence Party are examples. Italy has had farcical groups such as the Lega Nord or the recent Five Star Movement, a bizarre rassemblement that seems to combine Reverend Jones People's Temple with Syriza, or 'revolutionary boyscoutism' with the disciplinarism of the societies of control. How can one escape the crisis? What discursive, possibly-winning narratives should be developed? Are the typically Anglo-Saxon neo-Keynesian politics an answer or, on the contrary, is it the new authoritarian populism that will prevail?

TS 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 to approach discursive formations by exposing the nondiscursive relations of encounter with events. For example, we can ask how the microsocial 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

OC Mario Tronti states that ‘there is populism because there is no people.’ That of the people is an enduring theme which Tronti disclaims in a very Italian way: ‘the great political forces use to stand firmly on the popular components of the social history: the Catholic populism, the socialist tradition, the diversity in communism. Since there was the people, there was no populism.’ Paul Klee often complained that even in historical artistic avant-gardes ‘it was people who were 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 the practice of revolution in the Tsarist Empire, a country plagued by the contradictions of a capitalist development in an underdeveloped territory (Lenin and bolshevism). Tronti carries on in his tranchant analysis of the Italian and European backgrounds: ‘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-judicial apparatuses, neopopulism constantly shapes “trust-worthy people” similar to the “customers portfolio” of the branded world of neoliberal economy: Berlusconi’s “people” have been following the deeds of Arcore’s Sultan for twenty years; Grillo’s followers are

adopting similar all-encompassing identifying processes, giving birth to the more confused impulses of the Italian social strata. With institutional fragility, fluctuating sovereignties and the oblivion of left-wing dogmas (class, status, conflict, solidarity, equality) how can we form people today? Is it possible to reinvent an anti-authoritarian people? Is it only the people or also politics itself that is lacking?

TS 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 PS4, 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 rightwing 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.¹ So yes, I agree with Tronti's point that you raise, about the people being missing from populism, or at least, to put it another way, they are difficult to make out in all this fog. *A new people need to be found.*

On Control

OC 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 has emerged. Deleuze's analysis is as follows: control societies have replaced disciplinary societies at the beginning of the twentieth 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 M5S: respectively Publitalia 80 owned by Marcello

Dell'Utri, and Casaleggio Associati owned by Gianroberto Casaleggio. The incontrovertible fact that two marketing companies stand behind these political projects reinforces Deleuze's analysis. Mechanisms of control, media events such as exit polls and infinite surveys, im/penetrable databases, data as commodities, 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?) neoliberalism. The misery of the new control techniques competes only with that of the glass house of transparency (web-control, of course). Jacques Ranciere says we live in the epoch of post- politics: how can we 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?

TS 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!**2**

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 rightwing 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 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 neoliberal cages?

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

OC The first decade of the 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. In Italy, following the electoral success of the Five Star Movement we witnessed a mutation of the typical prosumer of social networks: the new figure of the “prosumer-voter” was in fact born on Grillo’s blog - being essentially the one and only channel of information of the movement. 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. All of 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. Having said this, are we about to witness a shift of the financial paradigm applied to politics? Will the fundings from powerful lobbies or the general public be replaced by micro-donations via web (in the style of Obama’s) and by the exploitation of the prosumer-voters? And if so, will the dominant 'googlization of politics' involve any particular risks?

TS 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

OC 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 whose technological and communicative characteristics 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 Five Stars Movement is the first successful example of Italian digital populism; Obama's campaign in the U.S.A. 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 1976, in the optic of the 'war-repression' schema, Foucault entitled his course at the Collège de France 'Society must be defended'. Now, 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'?

TS 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. 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 microfascism *everywhere!* So we still need to focus on resisting all forms of fascism, but trying out nonimitative 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.³ 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 leftwing 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?

¹ *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 Nathaniel Philip Rothschild.*

² *In a speech to the Tory party conference on Wednesday Oct 10th 2012, British PM David Cameron promised to 'spread privilege' of the kind he enjoyed growing up as he vowed to make the country one of aspiration.*

³ *There is currently an EDL pub in the town.*

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 microsociology and Deleuze's philosophy of the event. He blogs at **Virality.**

Simon Choat's interview on digital populism and recent European political phenomena, held on **16th June 2013** with the author of the blog **Obsolete Capitalism**.

Crowd, Power and Post-democracy in the 21st Century

'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 desires its very own repression?"'

— Gilles Deleuze, Fèlix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

On the micro-fascism

Obsolete Capitalism 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 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 the authoritarian Berlusconi's Freedom People (PDL) and Grillo's Five Star Movement (M5S) conquer more than half of the Italian electorate together. A very similar situation arose in the UK in May 2013, with the UKIP's exploit in the latest local elections. Why and in what measure are the toxins of authoritarianism and micro-fascism present in contemporary European society?

Simon Choat 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 doesn't 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

OC In 2008 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 1930s 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 UK Independence Party are examples. Italy has had farcical groups such as the Lega Nord or the recent Five Star Movement, a bizarre rassemblement that seems to combine Reverend Jones People’s Temple with Syriza, or ‘revolutionary boyscoutism’ with the disciplinarianism of the societies of control. How can one escape the crisis? What discursive, possibly-winning narratives should be developed? Are the typically Anglo-Saxon neo-Keynesian politics an answer or, on the contrary, is it the new authoritarian populism that will prevail?

SC 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 M5S 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

OC Mario Tronti states that 'there is populism because there is no people.' That of the people is an enduring theme which Tronti disclaims in a very Italian way: 'the great political forces use to stand firmly on the popular components of the social history: the Catholic populism, the socialist tradition, the diversity in communism. Since there was the people, there was no populism.' Paul Klee often complained that even in historical artistic avant-gardes 'it was people who were 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 the practice of revolution in the Tsarist Empire, a country plagued by the contradictions of a capitalist development in an underdeveloped territory (Lenin and bolshevism). Tronti carries on in his tranchant analysis of the Italian and European backgrounds: '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-judicial apparatuses, neopopulism constantly shapes "trust-worthy people" similar to the "customers portfolio" of the branded world of neoliberal economy: Berlusconi's "people" have been following the deeds of Arcore's Sultan for twenty years; Grillo's followers are adopting similar all-encompassing identifying processes, giving birth to the more confused impulses of the Italian social strata. With institutional fragility, fluctuating sovereignties and the oblivion of left-wing dogmas (class, status, conflict, solidarity, equality) how can we form people today? Is it possible to

reinvent an anti-authoritarian people? Is it only the people or also politics itself that is lacking?

SC 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 don't 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 fantasises about a 'multitude'), but these alliances should be rooted in our concrete experiences of (un)employment, exploitation, etc.: 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 maybe I've misunderstood Tronti's claims...)

On Control

OC 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 has emerged. Deleuze's analysis is as follows: control societies have replaced disciplinary societies at the beginning of the twentieth 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 behind two very successful electoral adventures such as Forza Italia (Berlusconi's first party) and M5S: respectively Publitalia 80 owned by Marcello Dell'Utri, and Casaleggio Associati owned by Gianroberto Casaleggio. The incontrovertible fact that two marketing companies stand behind these political

projects reinforces Deleuze's analysis. Mechanisms of control, media events such as exit polls and infinite surveys, im/penetrable databases, data as commodities, 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?) neoliberalism. The misery of the new control techniques competes only with that of the glass house of transparency (web-control, of course). Jacques Ranciere says we live in the epoch of post- politics: how can we 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?

SC 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

OC The first decade of the 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. In Italy, following the electoral success of the Five Star Movement we witnessed a mutation of the typical prosumer of social networks: the new figure of the “prosumer-voter” was in fact born on Grillo’s blog - being essentially the one and only channel of information of the movement. 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. All of 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. Having said this, are we about to witness a shift of the financial paradigm applied to politics? Will the fundings from powerful lobbies or the general public be replaced by micro-donations via web (in the style of Obama’s) and by the exploitation of the prosumer-voters? And if so, will the dominant '*googlization of politics*' involve any particular risks?

SC 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

OC 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 whose technological and communicative characteristics 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 Five Stars Movement is the first successful example of Italian digital populism; Obama's campaign in the U.S.A. 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 1976, in the optic of the 'war-repression' schema, Foucault entitled his course at the Collège de France 'Society must be defended'. Now, 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'?

SC 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 don't 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.

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Alberto Toscano's interview on digital populism and recent European political phenomena, held on **17th November 2013** with the author of *Obsolete Capitalism* and *Rizomatika*.

Crowd, Power and Post-democracy in the 21st Century

'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 desires its very own repression?'

Gilles Deleuze, Fèlix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

On the micro-fascism

Obsolete Capitalism 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 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 the authoritarian Berlusconi's Freedom People (PDL) and Grillo's Five Star Movement (5SM) conquer more than half of the Italian electorate together. A very similar situation arose in the UK in May 2013, with the UKIP's exploit in the latest local elections. Why and in what measure are the toxins of authoritarianism and micro-fascism present in contemporary European society?

Alberto Toscano 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 M5S 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 M5S 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 M5S 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 wouldn't 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] microfascisms 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 M5S 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 M5S 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

OC In 2008 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 1930s 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 UK Independence Party are examples. Italy has had farcical groups such as the Lega Nord or the recent Five Star Movement, a bizarre rassemblement that seems to combine Reverend Jones People's Temple with Syriza, or 'revolutionary boyscoutism' with the disciplinarism of the societies of control. How can one escape the crisis? What discursive, possibly-winning narratives should be developed? Are the typically Anglo-Saxon neo-Keynesian politics an answer or, on the contrary, is it the new authoritarian populism that will prevail?

AT 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 – 'neoliberalism', 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 neoliberalism 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 imagineered 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

OC Mario Tronti states that 'there is populism because there is no people.' That of the people is an enduring theme which Tronti disclaims in a very Italian way: 'the great political forces use to stand firmly on the popular components of the social history: the

Catholic populism, the socialist tradition, the diversity in communism. Since there was the people, there was no populism.' Paul Klee often complained that even in historical artistic avant-gardes 'it was people who were 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 the practice of revolution in the Tsarist Empire, a country plagued by the contradictions of a capitalist development in an underdeveloped territory (Lenin and bolshevism). Tronti carries on in his tranchant analysis of the Italian and European backgrounds: '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-judicial apparatuses, neopopulism constantly shapes "trust-worthy people" similar to the "customers portfolio" of the branded world of neoliberal economy: Berlusconi's "people" have been following the deeds of Arcore's Sultan for twenty years; Grillo's followers are adopting similar all-encompassing identifying processes, giving birth to the more confused impulses of the Italian social strata. With institutional fragility, fluctuating sovereignties and the oblivion of left-wing dogmas (class, status, conflict, solidarity, equality) how can we form people today? Is it possible to reinvent an anti-authoritarian people? Is it only the people or also politics itself that is lacking?

AT 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-nineteenth century US, and on to twentieth and twenty-first 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 subsuming, 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 doesn't 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 don't 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 can't, for analytical and strategic reasons, treat the exploited as a homogenous group. It is a struggle to 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

OC 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 has emerged. Deleuze's analysis is as follows: control societies have replaced disciplinary societies at the beginning of the twentieth 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 M5S: respectively Publitalia 80 owned by Marcello Dell'Utri, and Casaleggio Associati owned by Gianroberto Casaleggio. The

incontrovertible fact that two marketing companies stand behind these political projects reinforces Deleuze's analysis. Mechanisms of control, media events such as exit polls and infinite surveys, im/penetrable databases, data as commodities, 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?) neoliberalism. The misery of the new control techniques competes only with that of the glass house of transparency (web-control, of course). Jacques Ranciere says we live in the epoch of post- politics: how can we 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?

AT 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 don't 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, etc. - 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

OC The first decade of the 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. In Italy, following the electoral success of the Five Star Movement we witnessed a mutation of the typical prosumer of social networks: the new figure of the “prosumer-voter” was in fact born on Grillo’s blog - being essentially the one and only channel of information of the movement. 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. All of 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.

Having said this, are we about to witness a shift of the financial paradigm applied to politics? Will the fundings from powerful lobbies or the general public be replaced by micro-donations via web (in the style of Obama's) and by the exploitation of the prosumer-voters? And if so, will the dominant 'googlization of politics' involve any particular risks?

AT 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 M5S, 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

OC 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 whose technological and communicative characteristics 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 Five Stars Movement is the first

successful example of Italian digital populism; Obama's campaign in the U.S.A. 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 1976, in the optic of the 'war-repression' schema, Foucault entitled his course at the Collège de France 'Society must be defended'. Now, 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'*?

AT 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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Lapo Berti's interview on digital populism and recent European political phenomena, held on **19th November 2013** with the author of *Obsolete Capitalism*.¹¹⁷

Crowd, Power and Post-democracy in the 21st Century

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 desires its very own repression?'

—Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

On the micro-fascism

Obsolete Capitalism 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 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 the authoritarian Berlusconi's Freedom People (PDL) and Grillo's Five Star Movement (M5S) conquer more than half of the Italian electorate together. A very similar situation arose in the UK in May 2013, with the UKIP's exploit in the

latest local elections. Why and in what measure are the toxins of authoritarianism and micro-fascism present in contemporary European society?

LB Empty Democracy. We have long since ceased to live in a political regime that can be defined genuinely democratic with regards to the way citizens elect their representatives and monitor their work. This means that citizens are now denied the chance to lead the process by which decisions are relevant to the community. In some extreme cases, like the Italian one, they are also subtracted from the formal power to choose their own representatives which should be the hallmark of a representative democracy and an inalienable political value. Paradoxically in most cases this power seems to be strictly adhered to, but in reality the actual power is permanently transferred into other hands and the citizen is only given an opportunity to participate to the farce of democratic elections. A carnivalesque celebration of a four- or five-year long privation of any form of control on the objectives pursued by the elected representatives and on the ways these objectives are achieved. No democratic regime has probably never been effective in creating a real 'people's power' — except in nascent stages. However it can be said that during certain periods, which vary from country to country, the delegation to the elected ones has been exercised in a way that used to represent an acceptable compromise where an actual popular will was able to determine with accuracy the objectives of the public action and the exercise of the governmental power. It is no longer so in any of the countries that we still call democracies.

Lapo Berti **The return of the elite.** For a long time now - and not just in Italy - the power of government has been steadily requisitioned by elites who derive their strength from holding a dominance in the economic, political and social setting. These groups, generally interconnected and characterised by a considerable exchangeability of the positions that contributes to their stability, form an oligarchy that has its own fundamental elements in finance as well as its founding ties. To fully understand the

scope of this process, we need to realise that globalization is not the result of spontaneous market dynamics as it is often claimed but rather a landing place consciously pursued by the world economic elites to avoid the possible interference of political constraints and the limits imposed by the national courts in which the old and obsolete power of the states expresses itself.

Globalization is first of all the creation of an area free from politics and law in which the financial oligarchy can freely unfold its plans for wealth and power. It is the extreme result of a war that was fought throughout the XX century between those who wanted to build a control of the politics on the world of economics and finance - in the name and on behalf of the community - and the economic elites who eagerly pursued the return to the pre-crisis status of laissez-faire. The break was represented by Roosevelt's New Deal and the decades of the social democratic compromise that followed the Second World War inspired by the Keynesian doctrine. The attempt was to make possible the coexistence of democracy and capitalism in a situation where the state acted as a regulator of social conflicts through the medium of public welfare. Since the beginning this breakthrough - imposed by the trauma of the Great Depression - was perceived from one part of the world-capitalist-elites as a dangerous drift able to jeopardize the survival of the capitalist system, therefore some projects of revanche were brought about, as the thirty years old neo-liberalism which then flew into the grand scheme of globalization. This is the result - today confirmed at a universal level with the formation of a global hidden oligarchy - of a long process that saw the formation and affirmation of the power of the elites in all spheres of social life. This process - of which there are plenty of signs throughout the period that saw the spread of democracy throughout the world- began to coincide with the first major wave of democratization which occurred as a reaction to the crisis of '29 being it perceived as a clear manifestation of the limits of the laissez-faire capitalism. From the moment it became clear that the leaders of the capitalistic world, starting from the American ones, were under attack, initiatives to establish a line of resistance against "excessive" demands of the democracy or against the project to put under control the initiatives of industrial and financial capitalism

started to take form. Throughout the West, the political parties were sucked into the process of social penetration of the elites and have become the ganglion cells of the elite power, transforming themselves into powerful elites, custodian of the conferred power in the representative democracies by the vote of the citizens and empowered to exercise the faculty of government on behalf of and in the interests of the above-mentioned capitalist elites in return for an involvement in the economic power and in the wealth it wields. The degeneration of the democratic systems has been produced and driven from the subjection of the leaders of the parties to the strategies of the economic elites. The parties, even those more popular as the mass parties, turned out to be permeable to the economic and financial power through their leaders. Corruption has permanently installed in the political landscape as an instrument of perversion of democratic mechanisms in favour of the interests of the ruling elites. The response of the people has taken many forms. The main one was an estrangement from a vote more and more perceived as a useless if not ridiculous act in front of the impermeability of a political world that has become entirely self-referential. We generally tend to consider the abstention from vote as a moving away from politics. It is not said. It may also be the product of a political awareness over the average that leads into skepticism in a faster and clearer way. In democracy the result does not change. When you start voting slapdash because there is no longer any hope of making your voice heard it means that something is irretrievably 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 it means that the break is serious and that it is very unlikely to be reversible in the short term.

The second reaction is even more insidious because it tends to transform and even to distort the entire democratic ethos. It is the populist response which shows increasingly conservative and anti-democratic connotations -if not reactionary- even when its roots stretch into the ground of the left wing area. Populism becomes a viable perspective when you create a huge void in the relationship between the expectations and the needs of the citizens and the political life which finds its only expression in the abstention from

voting or in the renounce to participate in what is now perceived as an empty ritual: the mandate to the representatives of the people. Populism makes its way when citizens lose hope of being able to be protagonists of the democratic life and take refuge in the search for a surrogate who represents their aspirations and who generally takes the shape of a figure of salvation, of a character which is imposed for his/her communicative skills, very often enhanced or even constructed by the media.

In Italy we have two forms of populism today; they seem very different on the surface but are essentially homogeneous from the point of view of the impulses that foster them and the social- political consequences that they bring about .They are the result of the crisis of XX century politics based on the ability of large mass parties to reflect and represent the social composition generated from Fordism. The traditional parties have become an oligarchic self-referential power aimed at the reproduction of an immovable ruling class. Moreover the interests of the different social groups have gone into the background replaced by a dense network of patronage. Large segments of the population have lost the confidence that the solution to social problems can come from the parties. The rites of the politics have become an abstruse game to the majority of the population. The populist parties have been looking for shortcuts, direct and simplified solutions. They have prepared the ground for the advent of miracle workers through the fiction of a direct relationship with the people and with the supposed willingness to set the agenda according to what people really wanted and through the game of surveys or the illusion of democracy on the web. In this regard Grillo and Berlusconi are identical. They both have paradoxically detected a desire for a real change and for the modernization of the country in the midst of primeval fears and anger but they have folded this purpose to their personal affirmation. Therefore the originally animated pulse for a spirit of reform has turned into a conservative result which makes people wait for the messianic single man who will save and find solutions. A push toward populist outcomes is probably inherent in the type of society that have been forged by the process of globalization. The discomfort that grabs millions of people when they perceive that their lives do not depend only by neighbourly relations altogether but by

what millions of strangers scattered in different places of the planet do and decide, the anguish that results in front of a destiny we do not feel more in control of but perceive as threatened by external dark forces, the feeling of helplessness that we feel in the face of a world that has become too complex, all these impulses result in a generalized unthinking request of simplification. And here again populism reappears with its enticing selection of shortcuts, with the illusion of being able to delegate someone the solution of all problems in exchange for visceral, fideistic adhesion which does not necessarily require the political reasoning or the well-aware commitment of the individuals. In this sense populisms are always right-side and undemocratic.

1919, 1933, 2013. On the crisis

OC In 2008 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 1930s 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 UK Independence Party are examples. Italy has had farcical groups such as the Lega Nord or the recent Five Star Movement, a bizarre rassemblement that seems to combine Reverend Jones People's Temple with Syriza, or ‘revolutionary boyscoutism’ with the disciplinarianism of the societies of control. How can one escape the crisis? What discursive, possibly-winning narratives should be developed? Are the typically Anglo-Saxon neo-Keynesian politics an answer or, on the contrary, is it the new authoritarian populism that will prevail?

LB If, as I sustain, we are faced with a crisis of paradigm, in that some parameters of the capitalist paradigm at work until the financial crisis of 2008 have exploded and the

main processes which structured its 'mechanics' no longer run, and therefore, the paradigm as a whole is no longer able to run the society, it follows that (1) the analysis should be focused on the symptoms that herald a new paradigm and (2) collective imagination should commit to project possible developments. Which in the case of Italy, but the same applies to the entire capitalist asset, means nobody should interfere with this inevitable transition in order to influence its outcome on the basis of traditional economic policies, whatever the doctrine behind them and considering a fundamental acquisition of collective experience from the 'short century', namely that there is no possibility to influence the economic and social processes according to a rational plan — to the extent of guiding them toward predetermined goals. Government-implemented policies are but a channel, however powerful, through which an actor, the political apparatus, seeks to interfere with the processes originating from the interaction of millions of decisions which are constantly being made due to the most diverse reasons. Apprised of this fundamental limit characterising the 'global society' we live in, it is valuable to indicate some directions in which it may be worthwhile pursuing the maximum social pressure that we are able to exert.

An issue that needs to be eradicated from the old order by an external action - as there is no mechanism within the system that can effectively or independently counter it - is that of privatized economic and financial power, in particular as it acts outside of any context of rules and, therefore, jurisdiction. This is an emptiness that characterizes the constitutional system of our democracies. When constitutionalism was born economic power had not been taken into account, perhaps because it was a vector of the change of regime that was taking place: the aim was defusing the socially destructive force of powers fostered by the new political order, subjecting them to the rules and mechanisms of balance. The institutional context in which economic power was left free to develop and practice in its own exclusive interest, triggered the development of powerful economic activities driven by the interest of those who foresaw a new powerful tool to access wealth - once a monopoly of the landowners.

This issue is centenarian and it entered the political agenda when Americans became wary of the disruptive power of trusts and therefore invented a means of control called Antitrust, an instrument supposed to tame this very power, bringing it back among the democratic processes. We know how it went. The Antitrust, today extended to almost every country in the world, proved to be little more than worth the paper it is printed on: always late, always chasing the metamorphosis of capitalist enterprise and above all incapable, today, of effectiveness on a global level.

Since Antitrust was established, large firms that abuse their monopoly power, however temporary or permanent, local or global, have always been looking for solutions, tricks, organizational changes in order to evade the rules and control of so-called trustbusters — organizations that oversee the proper functioning of the market. To an extent, globalization is the result of the pressure of large companies involved in circumventing nationally imposed rules. An improper competition between jurisdictions aiming to attract global enterprises arose, together with tax havens and a shadow banking system which, in turn, encouraged the formation of a global finance, also released from the rules that states are trying to put in place .

A - possibly global - movement needs to be born. One that knowingly places this issue at the centre of information and awareness campaigns. Occupy Wall Street and all its possible variations in different countries are not enough, even though these spasms are the lively demonstration that the global civil consciousness is far ahead of the academic and political discourse. A different capitalism, for this and nothing else can be considered, in line with the new demands of the global society can only arise on the basis of a new constitutional pact that emplaces the perception of a perimeter to be placed around economic activities, starting with the level of wealth, inequality and economic power that a company is able to tolerate in order to maintain its cohesion and attractiveness.

The second point is a joint or, better, a projection of the first. A sustainable capitalism can only be the product of a collective mobilization large enough to induce significant

disruptions in the trajectories of current economy, left to the dominant influence of strong actors, big business and Governments. Through the viral multiplication of (small) individual choices, it is within the market, and not against or out of it, that the lines of an alternative model can assert themselves, forcing large and globalised companies to acknowledge a framework of preferences determined by the will of citizens rather than induced by the wild use of advertising. First and foremost needed is a cultural revolution which generates a collective awareness of the need to impart a powerful push for change to our model of society, regaining a taste for a quality life that is compatible with the economical use of resources and rich in values.

On the organisation

OC 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 Mr. Grillo has branched into society thanks to the territorial formula of meet-ups borrowed directly from the American politician Howard Dean (see [Wired](#)). However the movement is even different from the meet-ups: is it possible to propose an analysis of its escalation as a new-energy carrier in swirling mutation (Félix Guattari would have called it "the absolute motion" of Grillo-machine)? What segments, threads, streams, leaps and heterodoxies make up Grillo's abstract war machine?

LB I find it quite difficult to grant the status of a social / political movement to Grillismo. Not that I underestimate the extent and novelty of a phenomenon which causes turmoil in the traditional categories of political analysis. As a simple observer of grillismo, I have the impression that it is the joint, and transient, product of very diverse processes cutting across Italian society. I would suggest four of these which are, as always in social realities, interconnected and partially overlap.

LP The first is the divergence that took place among a growing share of the public opinion and the political class. This separation has gradually eroded trust in political parties as possible tools to guide society, even imperfectly, towards shared goals and achieve the greater good for the greater number of people. The generalized lack of trust in the political system has sometimes resulted in an open hostility towards its main representatives. The rejection of parties has often taken the form of a visceral reaction, complete with the dismissal of any form of mediation and, therefore, tools of representation — without which it is unlikely for a democracy to survive. The widespread political culture has impoverished to the point of becoming rude indifference, marked by brutal but effective slogans on the lines of ‘they are all the same / they are all thieves’ and the highly popular ‘vaffa’, or ‘f**k off’. Political debate and reasoning, which together with the taste for mediation and compromise are the essence of politics, have been replaced by a stream of invective. The right of free speech, sacrosanct in itself, gave rise to a political Babel without construct, to which Social Networks contributed substantially.

A new space was born, and this is my second point, in which the most extravagant solutions were advanced in conjunction with an illusion of a direct democracy, enacted by social networking instruments operating on a virtually unlimited scale, thus overcoming the very inherent limitation of this form of democracy. The contortions of grillismo show how uneven this road is. However, this politically empty space exposed a positive phenomenon that is both a resource and a problem: the new will to embark on politics of a growing number of, especially young, individuals reluctant to delegate and therefore to accept representative rites. The best kind of grillismo is the one that stimulates these energies, starting points of the restoration of a democratic life that can tackle the scandal of non-constitutionalised powers, from economy to communications. One of the key political issues today is how to input such energies into the channels of representation in novel, or at least refurbished, ways.

The third observation is that grillismo, at this time, is mainly a vehicle available to those who wish to express their detachment from the current ruling class, and not just the

political one. As such its rhetorics are re-appropriated by the electorate of the left, exasperated by the inadequateness of their representatives.

While my first observations feed into the sphere of questions and expectations flowing into the FSM channel, the last point I wish to make concerns the way in which the grillismo tries to answer them. Here we have, and without any doubts, an eclectic populism that seeks to convey the protest in an attempt to seize power, exerted by an illegitimate team, and most importantly played by a comic persona whose role as a showman is used to plastically represent the protest and easily obtain consent in the piazza. The contents are not supposed to embody a perspective of a functional society in the interests of the majority, but only to capture an immediate form of consensus, without the fatigue of building on the convergence of a coherent program.

In extreme synthesis, the grillismo presents itself as two-faced phenomenon. On the one hand, it converges elements of a protest and a disapproval arising from the vacuum left by a political class that largely manages the interests of an oligarchy — one built on economic relationships. On the other hand, it attempts to turn the crisis of representational politics into a form of mediated direct democracy behind which hides the specter of the charismatic leader who lives in symbiosis with his people. A people solely entitled to applause. The repeatedly expressed and delirious will to conquer 100% of the electorate is the utmost example of the negation of politics and of a totalitarian pulse.

On tidal waves

OC Franco Berardi wrote on MicroMega.net 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 sub-national geographic units, obtained a score of 0.9 out of 1, more than the PDL (0.889) and the left-wing Democratic Party (PD) (0.881). How could a newly-born movement not only compete with, but even beat well-established voting machines such as the ones of Mr. Berlusconi and of the organized left?

LB Simply put, the mechanism of representation jammed and stopped producing meaningful results. The electoral results of February 24 represent both a confirmation of this jam and a point of non return within the Italian political system.

The most direct way to describe the problem of representation is to use the metaphor of the market. Because of a number of easily identifiable reasons, the political offer, or ‘supply’ and the ‘demand’ drifted apart so much that a large proportion of citizens - nearly half of the potential voters - has ceased to express interests in voting, while other large shares of voters grabble, trying to articulate the anger that they have built up. Some additional considerations:

- The ideological barriers within which both traditional parties and, albeit to varying degrees, novel ones try to attract consensus no longer reflect the composition of our society or the configuration of social interests. These are but a facade masking sectional interests which are not always commendable and facilitate an inept ruling class to maintain their positions of (personal) power. In this regard, forces must emerge that are capable of giving a coherent expression to homogeneous aggregations of interests in the name of shared perspectives. The bodies of the representation must go back to representing something actually existent and active in society. We have not reached this point yet. The extreme disempowerment of autonomous politics we are witnessing is still able to ensure the survival of a ruling political class that can nonetheless stand on the last shreds of consensus that social inertia still grants. The lack of votes has not been fruitful so far, as it is absorbed and compensated for by a purely formal operation

of the mechanisms of democratic representation. I do not foresee radical enough changes.

- The atomization of the social composition combined with the oligarchic involution of politics and the intrusiveness of an economic power capable of dictating the agenda of governments, as well as the disappearance of the ideological tie proper of popular cultures of the XX century, represent a difficult and likely insuperable obstacle for the recovery of large areas of social consensus gathered around political plans complex enough to be projected as a possible form of government. Ephemeral alliances prevail: they are limited in range and overall incapable of having a significant impact on those power structures inherited from the era of the social-democratic compromise. Occupy Wall Street is a prime example as, while appealing to the interests of the overwhelming majority of citizens, it fails to express an effective political opposition. The only solution that seemingly offers a possible way out of the 'ghetto' of political irrelevance for the State is to reconstruct the 'society of the middle' which used to saturate the network of representation and which today is largely overwhelmed by the implosion of our political system. This means starting from the bottom, from the forms of both aggregation through which changes of behaviour and lifestyle occur and resistance of the economic actors who operate in a territorial dimension aspiring to confront the challenges of globalization.
- The biggest and almost insurmountable problem in Italy is that of a society which evolved in the shelter of a genuine process of modernisation, enabling the survival of cultures, customs, behaviors, values and forms of relationships that drew from a pre-modern social context and established themselves to ensure the survival of both an individual and a community in a world barely touched by the capitalist modes and the pressures of globalization. The unfinished modernization has strengthened a series of hostile attitudes among the deepest layers of society, where people's opinions form, which seemed to reject the 'modern' in all its forms, in spite of naively getting excited for its 'inventions'.

They inflamed with the fascist narrative, went through, almost unchanged, the great cauldron of Demo-Christian reformism and returned to exalt the anomaly of Berlusconism who revealed, once and for all, their populist and undemocratic fund. They speak today and did yesterday for a good half of the Italian people and when triggered have influenced, and still influence, the destinies of the country.

On the missing people

OC Mario Tronti states that ‘there is populism because there is no people.’ That of the people is an enduring theme which Tronti disclaims in a very Italian way: ‘the great political forces use to stand firmly on the popular components of the social history: the Catholic populism, the socialist tradition, the diversity in communism. Since there was the people, there was no populism.’ Paul Klee often complained that even in historical artistic avant-gardes ‘it was people who were 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 the practice of revolution in the Tsarist Empire, a country plagued by the contradictions of a capitalist development in an underdeveloped territory (Lenin and bolshevism). Tronti carries on in his tranchant analysis of the Italian and European backgrounds: ‘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-judicial apparatuses, neopopulism constantly shapes “trust-worthy people” similar to the "customers portfolio" of the branded world of neoliberal economy: Berlusconi’s “people” have been following the deeds of Arcore’s Sultan for twenty years; Grillo’s followers are adopting similar all-encompassing identifying processes, giving birth to the more confused impulses of the Italian social strata. With institutional fragility, fluctuating sovereignties and the oblivion of left-wing dogmas (class, status, conflict, solidarity, equality) how can we form people today? Is it possible to

reinvent an anti-authoritarian people? Is it only the people or also the politics itself to lack?

LB I do not know if you can make a people; the democratic people was perhaps a great invention that persuaded us, for a while, that the issue of rights and individual freedoms had finally been resolved. The people, in fact, is a metaphor that tries to give unity to what is not unitary: society is far from a unitary body and rather undergoes a myriad of cracks, splits, joints which transform it in depth and often emerge in the form of contrasts and local conflicts, intermittent or permanent, eventually finding their way of recomposition through the thousand streams of political representation. This is at any given moment in history the very essence of a society and what determines its evolutionary dynamics.

However we need(ed) politics, that activity and accompanying institutions able to reduce social complexity and rearrange it as a subject of possible decisions. Which is exactly what seems to be missing now: over the last thirty years the political practice drifted away from social dynamics, crossed with the sphere of economic interests and has become self-referential. The process of public decision-making, fundamental output of a democratic society as much yesterday as today, has become the preserve, or private affair, of a few small groups of elites, including the political one, interconnected with each other.

The rogue individualism that thanks to the globally dominant oligarchy gained momentum and became the most widespread and shared ideology, even at a popular level, undermined those elements of connection, culture, politics and organization which, taken together, formed the basic social nexus of a collective life. Society almost disintegrated and seemed to have lost the ability to produce co-operative values and behaviours.

On control

OC 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 has emerged. Deleuze's analysis is as follows: control societies have replaced disciplinary societies at the beginning of the twentieth 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 M5S: respectively Publitalia 80 owned by Marcello Dell'Utri, and Casaleggio Associati owned by Gianroberto Casaleggio. The incontrovertible fact that two marketing companies stand behind these political projects reinforces Deleuze's analysis. Mechanisms of control, media events such as exit polls and infinite surveys, im/penetrable databases, data as commodities, 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?) neoliberalism. The misery of the new control techniques competes only with that of the glass house of transparency (web-control, of course). Jacques Ranciere says we live in the epoch of post- politics: how can we 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?

LB I am not persuaded that neo-liberalism created a cage-like situation. Today we witness the ultimate stage of a process that has seen the emergence of an unchanged ideology drawing from the large family of 'liberalism', but which in reality shares but a few points with classical liberalism. This ideology was inspired, endorsed and most of all supported by some epicenters of world capitalism that have set themselves the goal to regain cultural hegemony as a means to assert their economic and political dominion. A cultural hegemony that was turned into driving force of a large and decisive work of dismantling the 'social democratic pact' or so-called 'Keynesian compromise', in other

words the 'mixed economy'. This was the only time and the only form, with all its variants, which granted life to democratic governments that could ensure cohesion and social progress on the basis of a compromise with the forces of global capitalism. As these powers had been weakened by the Great Depression, they had agreed to reluctantly share the premises of a social project that limited their freedom to act and, more importantly, asked them to co-operate in the construction of a more equitable reality.

Following the financial crisis of 2008 we now find ourselves at a similar turning point. If the global society is not be able to field enough energy to impose yet a new compromise, the discourse of global economy, and hence of world politics, will be jeopardized by the oligarchy that emerged victorious from the confront with the Keynesian compromise, giving life to a world order based on the dynamics of a market on which a small group of mega-organizations linked by a dense network of (mostly hidden) relations will exert domain.

The victory of this accumulation of interest on a global scale is a consequence of the ideological war fought at all levels to conquer cultural hegemony around the world. As a result the major ideologies that had innervated the political struggle of the XX century weakened and had not been able to face or even acknowledge the challenge, failing to radically renew their analysis and prospect. The most serious consequence of such a defeat is that the collapse of socialist ideology in particular dragged the whole political apparatus away, and firstly the political parties, a key protagonist of the last century's conflicts. In representative democracies the Parties had the function to represent the needs and aspirations of the people, to organize consent, to define the ruling class, to organize governments and formulate their programs, to monitor the implementation of laws. Without these basic functions a democracy does not exist, or rather turns into something else. This is our situation today; real power has been transferred elsewhere and is exerted without any legitimacy, without any democratic control, in a mostly hidden fashion.

At present time in all societies of the world citizens are taking on the role, more or less consciously, of remedying to the situation by, for instance, re-establishing a communication channel with the democratic branch of formal power. However most initiatives remain hopelessly powerless and hardly deal with the problem of a huge democratic rebirth.

Both the economic and related political processes of the last thirty years have disintegrated the social fabric that kept Western communities together, threatening the formation of a collective will that can be translated, with the limitations of the case, into a form of government of social processes.

The illusion, typical of early modernity, of a political system that is able to guide society towards the goals of a shared project has vanished. As gone are the days of politics understood as a project. The void left is great and not only for the failures that it produced, the illusions it fed or the suffering it imposed; it is a great void because nobody can fill it and because those elites that form the global oligarchy are left scampering in it.

The decline of left wing culture, whether of Marxist, socialist or communist origins, depends on the absence, except in some cases, of an actual confront with the real liberalism and the consequent failure in advancing a market culture of their own. Thinking - something the left did not do often in recent decades - of the market meant considering it as a transient institution, a crude, barbaric kingdom reigned by the animal spirits of capitalism, hence destined to be supplanted by a rational order pivoting on the role of the state. There wasn't the analytical intelligence to understand that the market is, in fact, a necessary institution in a capitalist structure and one that, properly understood, could tame the animal spirits and make them compatible with a democratic social order. Perhaps capitalism was intended as a temporary phenomenon, expected to be quickly passed, instead of a supporting structure of our economies and societies destined to last, although through continuous crisis and metamorphosis. To think capitalism was given over as it was to identify possible modalities of its coexistence with a society rich of democratic institutions in the era of global challenge. As a result, the

political culture of the left doomed itself to irrelevance and sought refuge in a sort of reserve inside which, sometimes, it seems satisfied, away from the harsh challenges of the present and in the comfortable remembrance of times gone by.

What strikes me of the attitudes of much of the left today is the stubborn obstinacy of clinging to an ideology which is mostly unable to grasp the essentials of our society and therefore unimaginative of corrective measures that bear a coherent view of the existing reality. We behave as if we could still engage, with voluntaristic stretching, in solutions from an imagined past, a time deemed mythical by the founders of a community that has long dissolved under the blows of a conflict mutating in forms and contents. The ultimate political defeat of the left derives from this cultural void, result of an unjustified sense of anthropological superiority that alienated it from the rest of society. It goes without saying that the political culture of the left can not produce an analysis of social composition and instead continues to invent new enemies and ephemeral conflicts which dissolve without a trace.

To break free from the neoliberal hegemony that has emerged in the last three decades — as a result of a cultural battle waged long before, a civilizing battle of opposite sign is needed, one that stimulates a vision of society both shared and sharable. It is not an easy challenge; the common people do not normally have the same means to campaign as the neoliberal pundits do. A starting point, however, is to abandon any ambition to recreate conflict 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 enquiry of the dividing line along which two fundamental ideas of society and two opposed understanding of the exercise of power alternate must be practiced. To do so we must break another myth of the left: the idea that the matrix of social conflict driving history is always and solely the configuration of relationships that are defined in the workplace. Work is still a fundamental dimension of social life, but is no longer one that structures its fundamental dynamics.

At present, the fault line that bisects the social body and writes the geometry of power relations no longer passes through the geography of their production relationships and

positions - employees / managers, workers / staff, employed / unemployed, manual workers / intellectuals, labourer / freelancer - but along the ridge that ultimately separates those who own the fate of the world, moving enormous resources and powerful organizations, from everyone else. 99% against 1%. The powerless mass against the totalising oligarchy.

The future conflicts, if any at all, will occupy the squares first and the workplaces later; the contents will be the quality of our lives, the survival of our environment and, above all, the need to set limits to an oligarchic power that has taken over the world without knowing how to handle it. Today's individuals - and not the masses, incapable of expressing subjectivity - must acknowledge the fact that their lives, made very interdependent by globalization, can be free and proper only if cooperating on a global scale, rediscovering those tools of expression of a collective will that the first democracy gave us but could not protect from the elites around them. We can not do without politics as a culture booster and an instrument to tame those powers threatening society. Nor can we do, presumably, without parties; although not today's ones but intermediate bodies which empower the role of individuals turning it into the engine of politics.

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Lapo Berti, Italian economist, worked at the Italian Antitrust Authority from March 1993 to July 2010. He has been Professor of Economic and Financial Politics. He has worked on problems of monetary theory and history of economic thought as well as on economic politics. He is the author of *L'Antieuropa delle monete* (with A. Fumagalli, Il Manifesto 1993) and of *Saldi di fine secolo. Le privatizzazioni in Italia* (Ediesse, 1998). Most recently he has published *Il mercato oltre le ideologie* (Università Bocconi Editore, 2006), *Le stagioni dell'antitrust* (with Andrea Pezzoli, Università Bocconi Editore 2010) and *Trattatello sulla felicità* (LUISS University Press, 2013). From 1964 to 1966 he worked with the left workerist group of the magazine "Classe Operaia" of which Mario Tronti was one of the founders (with Massimo Cacciari and Alberto Asor

Rosa) and during the Seventies he was one of the editors of the militant projects Primo Maggio.

Luciana Parisi and **Tiziana Terranova's** interview on digital populism and recent European political phenomena, held on **11 December 2013** with the author of *Obsolete Capitalism* and Rizomatika blog.

Crowd, Power and Post-democracy in the 21st Century

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 desires its very own repression?"

Gilles Deleuze, Fèlix Guattari - *A Thousand Plateaus*

On the micro-fascism

Obsolete Capitalism 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 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 the authoritarian Berlusconi's Freedom People (PDL) and Grillo's Five Star Movement (5SM) conquer more than half of the Italian electorate together. A very similar situation arose in the UK in May 2013, with the UKIP's exploit in the latest local elections. Why and in what measure are the toxins of authoritarianism and micro-fascism present in contemporary European society?

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 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 can not 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 “Berlusconism” 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 5 Star-MPs 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 can not see it uniquely as a right-wing authoritarian movement but as a chaotic container that the voice of Grillo can not 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, etc.) 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

OC In 2008 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 1930s 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 UK Independence Party are examples. Italy has had farcical groups such as the Lega Nord or the recent Five Star Movement, a bizarre rassemblement that seems to combine Reverend Jones People's Temple with Syriza, or 'revolutionary boyscoutism' with the disciplinarism of the societies of control. How can one escape the crisis? What discursive, possibly-winning narratives should be developed? Are the typically Anglo-Saxon neo-Keynesian politics an answer or, on the contrary, is it the new authoritarian populism that will prevail?

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 neoliberal 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 can not 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 5SM 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

OC 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 Mr. Grillo has branched into society thanks to the territorial formula of meet-ups borrowed directly from the American politician Howard Dean (see Wired). However the movement is even different from the meet-ups: is it possible to propose an analysis of its escalation as a new-energy carrier in swirling mutation (Félix Guattari would have called it "the absolute motion" of Grillo-machine)? What segments, threads, streams, leaps and heterodoxies make up Grillo's abstract war machine?

TT Of course I could be wrong because everything seems to change very quickly, but right now I don't 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 etc.; 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 hasn't 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, can not 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

OC Franco Berardi wrote on MicroMega.net 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 sub-national geographic units, obtained a score of 0.9 out of 1, more than the PDL (0.889) and the left-wing Democratic Party (PD) (0.881). How could a newly-born movement not only compete with, but even beat well-established voting machines such as the ones of Mr. Berlusconi and of the organized Left?

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 Mr. 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

OC Mario Tronti states that ‘there is populism because there is no people.’ That of the people is an enduring theme which Tronti disclaims in a very Italian way: ‘the great political forces use to stand firmly on the popular components of the social history: the Catholic populism, the socialist tradition, the diversity in communism. Since there was the people, there was no populism.’ Paul Klee often complained that even in historical artistic avant-gardes ‘it was people who lacked.’ 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 the practice of revolution in the Tsarist Empire, a country plagued by the contradictions of a capitalist development in an underdeveloped territory (Lenin and the bolshevism). Tronti carries on in his tranchant analysis of the Italian and European backgrounds: ‘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-judicial apparatuses, neopopulism constantly shapes “trust-worthy people” similar to the “customers portfolio” of the branded world of neoliberal economy: Berlusconi’s “people” have been following the deeds of Arcore’s Sultan for twenty years; Grillo’s followers are adopting similar all-encompassing identifying processes, giving birth to the more confused impulses of the Italian social strata. With institutional fragility,

fluctuating sovereignties and the oblivion of left-wing dogmas (class, status, conflict, solidarity, equality) how can we form people today? Is it possible to reinvent anti-authoritarian people? Is it only the people or also the politics itself to lack?

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

OC 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 twentieth 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 M5S: respectively Publitalia 80 owned by Marcello Dell'Utri and Casaleggio Associati owned by Gianroberto Casaleggio. The incontrovertible fact that two marketing companies stand out reinforces Deleuze's analysis. Mechanisms of control, media events such as exit polls and infinite surveys, im/penetrable databases, data as commodities, 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?) neoliberalism. The misery of the new control techniques competes only with that of the glass house of grina transparency (web-control, of course). Jacques Ranciere says we live in the epoch of post-politics: how can we 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?

TT The strongest innovation of the 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 twentieth 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.

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science and philosophy, cybernetics and information, technology and policy in order to formulate a critique of capitalism and at the same time investigate the possibility of real change. During the 1990s she has been working with the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit at Warwick (UK) and has written several essays in collaboration with Steve Goodman (known in the music world as dominus of dubstep as Kode9). In 2004 she published the book “*Abstract Sex: Philosophy, Biotechnology and the Mutations of Desire*” (Continuum, London, 2004), where she described the critical *impasse* among the notions of body, sexuality, “gender” and the current status of the studies of science and technology. Her latest work on architectural models and the role of algorithms in the interactive design is “*Contagious Architecture. Computation, Aesthetics and Space*” (MIT Press, USA, 2013).

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in UK in 2004 by Pluto Press and in Italy in 2006 by Il Manifesto. Her last essay entitled 'Capitalismo cognitivo e vita neurale' was inserted in May 2013 e.Book issue called 'Lo stato della mediazione tecnologica' by Giorgio Griziotti (Speciale Ipermedia - Alfabeta edizioni).

Paolo Godani's interview on digital populism and recent European political phenomena, held on **24th January 2014** with the author of **Obsolete Capitalism**.

Crowd, Power and Post-democracy in the 21st Century

'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 desires its very own repression?"

Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus.

On the micro-fascism

Obsolete Capitalism 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 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 the authoritarian Berlusconi’s Freedom People (PDL) and Grillo’s Five Star Movement (5SM) conquer more than half of the Italian electorate together. A very similar situation arose in the UK in May 2013, with the UKIP’s exploit in the latest local elections. Why and in what measure are the toxins of authoritarianism and micro-fascism present in contemporary European society?

Paolo Godani I believe that the macro-political reflection, as is that of Wu Ming, and the micro-political analysis that you propose should be carried out separately. They should be considered, formally at least, as different floors, each having its own categories and inner organization. The consideration of Wu Ming and others after them

— thinking for instance about the recent text by Alessandro Dal Lago, *Clic. Grillo, Casaleggio e la demagogia elettronica* (Cronopio 2013) — concerns the *explicit* and, as a result, exploits the same categories fed to ordinary political debate and reflects on the global and explicit distribution of consent as it emblematically appears in the general election. On the other hand a micro-political analysis ignores global partitions since it turns its attention to trends that are not instantly visible, or often unconscious, and that cut through the entire social field, returning a different configuration than that emerging from ordinary political discourse. In this sense it is essential to identify those micro-fascist instances crossing the Italian society precisely because they are found where they shouldn't be, according to the macro-political analysis. I would then answer separately the question on authoritarianism and the one on micro-fascism.

I think it is crucial to understand authoritarianism as a systemic factor rather than as a localised and contingent tendency. Rather than this or that party or movement, it's the government's *dispositif* put in place in European countries at the time of the crisis that are authoritarian — in an attempt to limit ourselves to the here and now. Authoritarian is the fact that austerity policies, privatisation, cuts to social and cultural spending and so forth are largely imposed by governments devoid of popular legitimacy. The cases of Greece and Italy are emblematic — but even in France the situation isn't too different. In short, traditional left and right political forces carry out the same kind of economic policies, which therefore remain totally indifferent to electoral alternation. This is, I believe, the reason why antisystemic political movements have been emerging in Greece, Italy and France. The fact that a significant part of these movements arises from the far-right can be accounted to the following: firstly the almost total lackness of any credible alternative system and secondly the fact that in times of crisis — one that is inseparably economic *and* psychic — the only tangible way out rely on unconscious investments of paranoid form which give rise to reactionary or, at worst, suicidal outcomes.

To my understanding, micro-fascisms are rooted precisely in this area of paranoid–reactionary investments. Which translates to something very simple: facing an issue arising from the current state of affairs, a challenge involving a transformation of self habits, categories and established practices one doesn't play along nor even try solutions or possible mediations but rather withdraws into oneself with the feeling of being surrounded. This paranoic *castling* is as much a psychological as an economic and political move; and in any case it is the sign of a profound weakness. Here two examples: the closure of borders in the face of migration, and the proposal of leaving the Euro when facing the problems of the single currency's imbalances and the global competition — resembling, and not just by chance, the “exit” from the world market advocated by fascist ideologies. It goes without saying that, on a political level, nationalism is a key ingredient for these kind of micro-fascisms.

If this is current state of affairs it is easy to spot micro-fascist instances behind every corner, from the far-right to the far-left and passing through those hybrids, albeit very different from each other, such as the Lega Nord and the 5SM.

1919, 1933, 2013. On the crisis

OC In 2008 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 1930s 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 UK Independence Party are examples. Italy has had farcical groups such as the Lega Nord or the recent Five Star Movement, a bizarre rassemblement that seems to combine Reverend Jones People's Temple with Syriza, or ‘revolutionary

boyscoutism' with the disciplinarianism of the societies of control. How can one escape the crisis? What discursive, possibly-winning narratives should be developed? Are the typically Anglo-Saxon neo-Keynesian politics an answer or, on the contrary, is it the new authoritarian populism that will prevail?

PG Let's keep in mind that when talking about the current crisis we are referring to a variety of distinct phenomena. There is the contingency of 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 that have marked the history of capitalism. There also is what has been rightly called a permanent crisis, that is a crisis which identifies itself with a profound transformation of capitalism summed up in the formula 'becoming rent of profit': in response to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (due to at least partially different mechanisms from those analysed by Marx) the current capitalism responds with a kind of valorization taking place outside of the production processes and namely through financialization. This leads to a self-governing capital independent from social and political dynamics (from the conflicts on the ground of surplus value production i.e. labor, and from the institutional mediations) and to the installation of a restricted circle of private interests able to change the fate of global economy.

Finally, there is a crisis affecting Europe and, perhaps within this, one peculiar to Italy. A crisis of standing pat, of cronyism, of endemic tax evasion... characteristics of an Italian situation we are familiar with and don't need to pause discussing on. The European problem may be of more interest because it is a political experiment that has no historical precedent (a political union merely based on a monetary union), because the failure of such an experiment could lead to disasters of no small account (if the European Union was born to prevent a recurrence of the conditions that led to two World Wars, one could argue its dissolution is likely to make those precise conditions relevant again) and finally, I believe, because this is the fertile ground for the previously

discussed fascist instances. Briefly: newly born national movements in Europe are calling for the release of their country from Euro because the latter is undoubtedly fully identified with the neoliberal policies of cutting social spending, privatisation, precarization of labour and life, low wages... Under this light, to oppose European economic policies is not a reactionary move. Moreover, in addition to this first element, there is a second equally important aspect: the national strategy with which the German economic policy exploits the European situation to increase its supremacy.

I have no recipes to answer your question on “how to escape the crisis”. I hope that if the analysis I have tried to sketch makes some sense, if it is true, for example, that populist and reactionary nationalisms are signs of impotence in the face of the authoritarianism characterising the way European governments respond to the crisis — a direct consequence of the current transformation of capitalism to which I referred before; then the one option we have is to fight it wherever possible, trying to open spaces of conflict so to enforce participation and democratic decision. The fear that governs reactionary investments is only defeated with the conquest of a real change.

The social-democratic policies based on relative redistribution of wealth have always been a sort of asymmetric mediation: they allowed to maintain the structural inequality of wealth and power among social classes, while however guaranteeing hopes of improving the conditions of life and work to subordinates strata. During the second half of the twentieth century many social struggles levered the existence of this very mediation. Even when they had radical ambitions, the welfare was the ground onto which laying down the struggles. What changed with the financialization 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 no longer distribute but rather appropriate the wealth produced by social cooperation, while being entirely absorbed by financial circuits. If in twentieth-century capitalism the segment appropriation—distribution was largely held by the States, in a way that let put pressure on them so that a more equitable

distribution followed appropriated wealth (according to the almost banal scheme elaborated by Carl Schmitt), today the problem is to build a collective, Non-State power to act directly and immediately on the appropriation of wealth, that is to say capable of re-socialising what financialization has privatized.

On the organisation

OC 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 Mr. Grillo has branched into society thanks to the territorial formula of meet-ups borrowed directly from the American politician Howard Dean (see Wired). However the movement is even different from the meet-ups: is it possible to propose an analysis of its escalation as a new-energy carrier in swirling mutation (Félix Guattari would have called it "the absolute motion" of Grillo-machine)? What segments, threads, streams, leaps and heterodoxies make up Grillo's abstract war machine?

PG I wouldn't underestimate the 5SM phenomenon; however more than a war machine it seems to be a kind of catalyst that sped up, collected and concentrated, reactions in-the-making. To an extent, nothing Grillo says wasn't already present in the political debate — except, perhaps, some issues related to innovation in the green economy, which unsurprisingly are *not* among the reasons of their electoral success. Anti-caste instances, for example, have been largely present in the *justicialist*¹ left propaganda of the last two decades. The opposition to the *jus soli* was and is a strong point of Lega Nord and generally of the Italian right. The opposition to European economic policies is shared among the entire political spectrum. The only real innovation of the 5SM is to bring common people into the Parliament. I believe that this is a positive factor — especially at a time when democracy seems to be overdetermined by economic

¹ Justicialist: translates the Italian word "giustizialista" that means the attitude of those who feel the need of a severe justice (often quick and hasty) especially for crimes committed by politicians.

“technique”.

I also struggle to see particularly relevant innovations at the organisational level of the 5SM: their communication tools and modes can only appear novel to a political class which grew up before the computer era. Finally, the presence of a charismatic tribune such as Grillo himself doesn't shine as a big news in an era during which the political show needs representatives able to communicate in an immediate and affective way.

Of another kind are the comments found in Grillo's blog, undoubtedly manifesting the purest moral and social resentment: a paranoid and self-referential delirium expressed in many similar cases — Raffaele Donnarumma wrote about this issue in [Le parole e le cose](#). Even this delirium isn't surprising when almost all the ways to avoid it are barred: the only antidote to this kind of phenomena is a collective discussion and the construction of a shared vocabulary and a common project through which anger and despair can leave the individual sphere.

I think, to conclude, that 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 an obtuse or opportunistic confidence in representative democracy.

On tidal waves

OC Franco Berardi wrote on MicroMega.net 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 sub-national geographic units, obtained a score of 0.9 out of 1, more than the PDL (0.889) and the left-wing Democratic Party (PD) (0.881). How could a newly-born movement not only compete with, but even beat well-established voting machines such as the ones of Mr. Berlusconi and of the organized Left?

PG I am not persuaded Bifo has reason to hope that the defeat of neo-liberal Europe has begun. Almost a year after the general election, it is now clear that the unexpected and shattering victory of the 5SM was driven back, as of today, by a conservative coalition.

The key moment for the recent Italian political situation 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 is back to being president as a sort of shelter against the nomination of Stefano Rodotà. Albeit the on-line voting system put in place by the 5SM was a farce in terms of representativeness, it is significant that most preferences fell on a politician and an intellectual (Stefano Rodotà) who had nothing to do with the populism, demagoguery and *justicialism* that seemingly characterised the movement. One could argue that this was the single smart move Grillo made — not his idea, in fact: as it otherwise happened with Romano Prodi, Rodotà nomination helped to shed light on the possible internal fractures of the Democratic Party. A move that, if I'm not mistaken, aroused some hope in environments other than those who voted for 5SM, hence the even more profound bitterness when back to normality.

Finally, I don't think the electoral success of the 5SM is particularly striking. At the end of the day it was the one movement who better was able to embody an objectively *existing position* in the political landscape: that is the opposition to authoritarian policies of austerity, or, at least, the rejection of consensus on conservative politics.

On the missing people

OC Mario Tronti states that ‘there is populism because there is no people.’ That of the people is an enduring theme which Tronti disclaims in a very Italian way: ‘the great political forces use to stand firmly on the popular components of the social history: the Catholic populism, the socialist tradition, the diversity in communism. Since there was the people, there was no populism.’ Paul Klee often complained that even in historical artistic avant-gardes ‘it was people who were 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 the practice of revolution in the Tsarist Empire, a country plagued by the contradictions of a capitalist development in an underdeveloped territory (Lenin and bolshevism). Tronti carries on in his tranchant analysis of the Italian and European backgrounds: ‘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-judicial apparatuses, neopopulism constantly shapes “trust-worthy people” similar to the “customers portfolio” of the branded world of neoliberal economy: Berlusconi’s “people” have been following the deeds of Arcore’s Sultan for twenty years; Grillo’s followers are adopting similar all-encompassing identifying processes, giving birth to the more confused impulses of the Italian social strata. With institutional fragility, fluctuating sovereignties and the oblivion of left-wing dogmas (class, status, conflict, solidarity, equality) how can we form people today? Is it possible to reinvent an anti-authoritarian people? Is it only the people or also politics itself that is lacking?

PG I dislike the term “populism”. I fully agree with Jacques Rancière when, in an article

published on *Libération*, he shows how the notion of populism is a device for constructing a certain image of “the people”, namely the image of ignorant masses, constitutively prey to their own instincts and to the dumbest demagogic sirens. Whoever makes use of the term *populism* should be consequent and affirm the necessity of an anti-democratic government of élites. Nobody openly claims this as a political principle since it would be “wrong”, however that’s what happens in our representative oligarchies. There is only one result of anti-populist rhetoric: a full subjection to the government of élites, since it prevents the totalitarian drift to which a neglected people would lead.

Of course “the people” is neither good nor bad, for, as Rancière argues, “the people” doesn’t exist. “The people” as a single entity or mass unified by some sort of principle or tendency, does not exist; however “many peoples” do exist into one and, moreover, there are many pictures of what a “people” might be. As a consequence, one abandoned the term “people” replacing it with that of “multitude”. Whatever political jargon one may adopt, the concept of populism undoubtedly has its precise governmental function in building the image of a people unified in its most brutal tendencies, thus to be subjected to the rationality of economics and political representation. Accepting the consequences induced by the use of this concept of populism considerably lessen the conditions if not of a revolt or revolution at least of a truly democratic politics.

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

On Control

OC 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 has emerged. Deleuze's analysis is as follows: control societies have replaced disciplinary societies at the beginning of the twentieth 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 M5S: respectively Publitalia 80 owned by Marcello Dell'Utri, and Casaleggio Associati owned by Gianroberto Casaleggio. The incontrovertible fact that two marketing companies stand behind these political projects reinforces Deleuze's analysis. Mechanisms of control, media events such as exit polls and infinite surveys, im/penetrable databases, data as commodities, 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?) neoliberalism. The misery of the new control techniques competes only with that of the glass house of transparency (web-control, of course). Jacques Rancière says we live in the epoch of post-politics: how can we 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?

PG It goes without saying that marketing plays a central role in contemporary society, not merely claiming to direct but also produce social practices and lifestyles. Current power links are much more pronged and intertwined than they already were at the time of industrial capitalism and the disciplinary society. However the principle according to which no form of domain is ever entirely master of its means still holds true: to consider the control apparatus omnipotent certainly leads to impotence, rather than a search for escape routes or new weapons for the revolt.

When Rancière speaks of the end of politics he isn't repurposing this diagnosis: he says

that there is a dominant discursive regime that aims to get rid of *politics*, that is radical dissent, social conflict, egalitarian utopia and the idea of a new common life; and he says that this discursive regime can not be distinguished from the wish of those claiming a purely technical politics, one that is ordinary and rational management, fiercely separated from the toxic ideas of those who understand politics as a transformation of the existing, a rupture of the established and a production of dissent. The latter in particular is of evenemential nature: in a specific time and space a novel political entity emerges to organise the revolt field. Like all events, these of a political kind have a great margin of uncertainty: it isn't just hard to predict but almost impossible to produce in a voluntarist fashion. A tactic, I believe, is to carefully look for those very small displacements, anxieties and microfractures that occur constantly and that, following uncertain reasons, could come together.

In 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 confined man nor the exploited worker, but rather the indebted man. Such analyses go in the same direction of that *becoming rent of profit* we discussed above. It is the same process of transformation of capitalism which corresponds to the transformation of work and production — growth of social cooperation, immaterial production, harassing life, affections and so on — and to which a transformation of the political strategies of conflict corresponds.

We need to go a step forward. It is not about extending the logic of a frontal collision between power and counter-powers, nor about reversing a model suggesting, as some Italian post-workerist 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 formation had produced. As well as understanding that the very same capitalist development raising those powers does everything possible to hold them

back, enslave them to a short-sighted, destructive logic and produce an immense wealth, alongside an immense misery. This is the double jump forward needed to escape the neoliberal cage: to be fully contemporaries of our time and welcome all of capitalist modernity while seeing that the current phase of capitalism may be the basis for the emergence of a post-capitalist society. One must be on top of one's time to be able to overcome it. In this sense I am in perfect harmony with what Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams wrote in their [*Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*](#).

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ETS , Pisa, 2005), *Bergson e la filosofia* (ETS , Pisa, 2008) *Deleuze* (Carocci, Roma, 2009). In collaboration with Delfo Cecchi he has published *Falsi raccordi. Cinema e filosofia in Deleuze* (ETS , Pisa, 2007); with Dario Ferrari, *La sartoria di Proust. Estetica e costruzione nella Recherche* (ETS , Pisa, 2010). He has translated and edited: Jacques Rancière, *Il disagio dell'estetica* (ETS , Pisa, 2009); Pierre Macherey, *Da Canguilhem a Foucault. La forza delle norme* (ETS , Pisa, 2011). His forthcoming book will be released (May 2014) by Derive e Approdi: *Senza Padri. Economia del desiderio e condizioni di libertà nel capitalismo contemporaneo*.

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