

Fascism ex nihilo

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Abstract: The present article discusses the new form of fascism which I have called “the fascism of ambiguity” from the viewpoint of the void of resistance and revolution. The void is considered not as lack of resistance and revolution but as the experience of “after” resistance and revolution, as a post- condition to which fascist desire of form responds through a dynamics of unsensing senses and meanings. The article engages with both Hannah Arendt and Claude Lefort reflections on the void of resistance and revolution and sketches a path towards a thought of the unforming.

Keywords: Fascism of ambiguity, void, resistance, democratic revolution, Hannah Arendt, Claude Lefort, unformed.

“The more we are assailed by the Nothing that yawns around us like an abyss or also from a thousandfold Something belonging to society and the activity of men that formlessly, soullessly and lovelessly haunts us and disperses us, the more passionate, intense and violent must be the resistance from our side. Or must it not?¹

The rise of extreme right movements in the last years in Europe and abroad is not surprising. Michael Löwy calls this rise “spectacular” and describes it as a “phenomenon without precedent since the thirties”². These words seem to affirm this “spectacular” rise as an unexpected repetition of what was supposed to have been overcome or at least domesticated, namely, totalitarianism, in its three historical forms: Fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism. In the same vein, although from different political and ideological positions, it has also been stated that “national conservatism ... is the return of the repressed”³. Without developing the use made by Freud of this psychoanalytical concept, again it is the figure of a return which immediately is brought as response to what is supposedly a surprising event. The assumption of a repetition and a return, the insistence on the backward and regressing movement as response to the surprising rise of the “right” in a contemporary moment dilacerated by “wrongs”, say perhaps more about the difficulty of grasping the present moment than about the phenomenon to be investigated. In the attempt to seize the contemporary moment in its specific mode of seizing us as contemporaneous, and to develop a “logical analysis of the concrete situation”, the French philosopher Gérard Granel proposed in the 90s that the thirties are still *devant nous*, an expression which rendered in English as “The thirties are still before us”, shows the ambiguity of today, of being a before which is still ahead, before us. With Granel’s words: “There is no question of saying that Fascism, Nazism and Stalinism, such as they were in history, only seem to have disappeared, but in reality, wait, behind the

door of the future, in order to sneak up behind us”⁴. And even if one would insist that fascism has unquestionably been defeated, what Arendt called “the archi-evil of our time” is far from having been eradicated since “its root are strong and they are called Anti-Semitism, Racism, Imperialism”⁵.

The surprising (re)emergence of the extreme “right” has received multiple designations: new, extreme, ultra, far, radical right or al-rightism. Some prefer to call it new conservatism, right-wing populism, or authoritarianism. And others consider that we should use the term “fascism,” even if it has a new form. Enzo Traverso employs the concept of “postfascism,” arguing that “the concept of fascism seems both inappropriate and indispensable for grasping this new reality”⁶. Alberto Toscano uses the term “late fascism”⁷. In my view, the variety of labels does not correspond to the observed diversity of this rightism⁸ but rather to the difficulty of conceptually seizing the contemporary moment, since it is from our present moment that this surprising rise unveils its novelty. It is a theoretical problem about how to think the contemporary moment without continuously referencing the past, since what is missed is precisely what is incomparable in the present. Beyond the recurrent questions such as: Is what we see at the present a repetition or a continuation of totalitarian forms and desires of the past? Is it a development of repressed fascist drives or a collapse of the democratic form? Another question: why is our contemporary moment so opaque? In fact, the underlying problem in the attempts to grasp the new in relation to the past is the astonishment regarding what has been called the “crisis” of democracy and the insight in how democracy can be destroyed from within. How can fascism and Nazism survive *within* democracy and not only as a tendency *against* democracy, is a question that Theodor Adorno had posed⁹. What is most surprising in this rise seems to be the insight into the collapse of democracy in the age of global automation, the age of *cyberocracy*¹⁰, the age in which the meaning of “total” and “totality” can hardly be separated from totalitarian automatism, and which is “totally” pervaded by the anxiety about the future of democracy and with the future of the future, when climate crisis, global poverty and misery, genocidal wars and the threat of total destruction of life destroy any possible hope for a future. To face these questions, and above all to reach the formulation of a question for our present, it seems necessary to first try to seize the present moment as present.

The present moment is commonly understood to be after a before and before an after. It is ungraspable since it is what seems to only be possible to grasp afterwards, *nachträglich* being itself the expectation for the coming and hence also at the same time *vorträglich*. It is *nachvorträglich*. The awareness of the present historical moment is an awareness of a connection to the past and the future, the introjection of a representation of time as a line of succession, a chronological representation of time. What could be considered as the specificity of the

present is however that it is *between* past and future. In which sense shall we understand the betweenness of the contemporary?

In the 50s, after her first visit to post-war Germany, Hannah Arendt put together what she called “six exercises of political” thought under the title *Between Past and Future*¹¹. In this book, she does not begin from the topic of totalitarianism – which is one of her main theoretical questions – but, somewhat surprisingly, from the experience of a void. Not the void of nothingness, nor the void of nihilism, nor the loss of God and of all beliefs, but the void of an accomplishment: the void that emerges when resistance achieves its goal and liberation from oppression is fulfilled. The preface of *Between Past and Future*, where the contemporary as *between* past and future is addressed, begins with a quote by the French poet René Char, a famous member of the French *résistance* during World War II. The quoted verse reads: *notre heritage n'est précédé d'aucun testament* [our inheritance was left to us by no testament]¹². More literally, our inheritance is not preceded by any testament. The inheritance Arendt refers to is not the one of a totalitarian past but of *Résistance*, of resistance, of the very acting for liberation which becomes itself a past when liberation is achieved. Besides, or rather together with, the inheritance of a *totalitarian past* there is an inheritance of *resistant past*. Indeed, this inheritance also shows that the past signifies the overcoming, or leaving behind, of both totalitarianism and resistance. In this text by Arendt, the resistant past is the one which is left to us without any testament. It remains a question if all past leaves us in such a way. Once achieved, acting for liberation liberates from acting. She describes this shift from action for liberation into liberation from action as the “loss of a treasure”, the treasure of being immersed in action, the treasure of the experience of fighting, which for her was the experience of always sitting beside the empty chair of freedom. The image of an empty chair in which freedom is set down defines freedom as undetermined and open. The question that emerges with this shift is what to do with the void installed by victory, a question that can be equally put in relation to every revolution, indeed that emerges in relation to every “post” condition, post-revolution, post-war, post-resistance, post-modernity¹³. The void demands to be fulfilled. René Char is a powerful example of Arendt’s thesis that the void, which emerges from the liberation of acting, is a demand, namely an appeal to thought. Arendt says that when René Char was writing during the last months of the Resistance, “when liberation – which in our context meant liberation from action – loomed large, [he] concluded his reflections with an appeal to thought for the prospective survivors no less urgent and not less passionate than the appeal to action of those who preceded him”¹⁴. The void of action, of resistance demands a contrary movement, no longer from thought to action as before but from action back to thought. Not “back” in the sense of turning back to what was left behind but turning the eyes away from the directedness toward a future – thus acting for liberation has freedom beside it, sitting in an empty chair, on one side, and, on the

other, the perspective of future and hope; “back” in the sense of turning back to this void, discovering this void; a turning back which urges thinking.

To describe this appeal to thought after experience, meaning in the void of experience, which is identical to the void of resistance, the void of the liberation of action –, Arendt reads Kafka. She reads the last of a series of notes from the year 1920, published under the title *Er, He*,¹⁵ because according to her Kafka occupies “the most advanced position” in terms of a “breath-taking reversal of the established relationship between experience and thought”¹⁶. Arendt interprets Kafka’s note as the “scene” of a battleground on which two forces, the past and the future, fight one another. Between them, a man whom Kafka calls “He”, must battle the other two forces, namely the past and the future. She considers that there are in fact three battles going on simultaneously: the fight between past and future, and the fight of the man in-between with each of them. In her reading, “the fact that there is a fight at all seems due exclusively to the presence of the man, without whom the forces of the past and of the future, one suspects, would have neutralized or destroyed the other long ago”¹⁷. Arendt reads this parable as a certain mistake or perhaps illusion, if one recalls Freud’s distinction between both¹⁸, made by Kafka when situating the man called “He” outside human time, in a certain Archimedean point from which the battle between past and future is being performed, and from which an overcoming could be reached. At the same time she reads the parable as the space of thought in the void of experience, in the void of resistance, a space between, which she describes further as a diagonal force, a parallelogram of forces “whose origin is known, whose direction is determined by past and future, but whose eventual end lies in infinity”, a metaphor she considers “perfect for the activity of thought”.¹⁹ Arendt brings these metaphors to address the gap of time between past and future as the “contemporary condition of thought” and embraces it as the sign of a non-time which necessarily exists in time. For Arendt, this renders possible the discovery that both past and future are infinite, that they are “clashing waves”, and that the thinking human existence stands its ground *between* them, indeed a ground without ground. Kafka embodies the most advanced position in the “breath-taking reversal of the relationship between experience and thought” insofar as his literature is a confrontation with a void which arises from the experience of having no way out, nor a way back, but having still to reach this point. Recalling Kafka’s own words: “*Von einem gewissen Punkt angibt es keine Rückkehr mehr. Dieser Punkt ist zu erreichen*”²⁰. Regarding this void or point of no return, it appeals to more than just thought. It is an appeal to think *otherwise*, to reverse in a breath taking – Paul Celan spoke about *Atemwende*, a breath-turning²¹ – the relationship between experience and thought, something Arendt recognizes in Kafka’s literature. Thus, for her Kafka is the experience of a “thought-event”, of a “thought-landscape”, who describes how a thought

is being thought. She embraces for herself this task when affirming the need to write exercises of [political] thought, and to write in the form of essay, since “the essay as a literary form has a natural affinity to the exercises I have in mind”²². This is how she receives the theoretical demand of the post-experience condition.

Arendt’s exercises of thought in this preface suggest that our contemporary moment of post-totalitarianism is the moment of a void, the void left by a long history of liberation and resistance, thus addressing this question from the viewpoint of anti-totalitarian struggles. The hypothesis I aim to sketch out in the present article is that the “surprising” uprise of “extreme right-wing movements” today should be rather grasped from the explosive energy of the void of the contemporary moment, the void of post-experience. These movements are strategies of conquest rather than movement whose aim is to fulfill the void, the void left when action for liberation liberates from action. It is a conquest by fission. This is in fact the void of a post-revolutionary condition. In line with Arendt, it could be said that after-revolution there is not really a counter-revolutionary tendency that serves as a control mechanism to ensure the outcomes of revolution or as reaction against revolution. After a revolution, what emerges is the void of the liberation of revolutionary action. Here, we could recall the thoughts on “democratic revolution” developed by the French political philosopher Claude Lefort, one of the first to engage with Arendt’s thoughts in France. One of Lefort’s main theses, sustained and developed throughout his work, is that modern democracy is the outcome of a regicide, the toppling of the sovereign figure of the “One”, of “indivision”, an overwhelming event which opened a symbolic “void place”. Drawing on Tocqueville’s thoughts on the democratic revolution, Lefort considers that the modern birth of democracy was however not only a revolution, which “shacked entirely the hierarchical building of society based on a ‘natural’ distinction among the beings of a society, a distinction sacralized through myth and religion”²³ but above all the ‘mutation’ of a symbolic other”²⁴, a new position of power. The death of the monarch as the incorporation of the symbolic order of the One exposes the mutation of its symbolic order. What emerges symbolically in this mutation called modern democracy is not really the “Many” as counterpart of the One but a “void place”. “...What emerges is the new notion of the place of power as void place”²⁵. This place is called “void” because neither an individual nor a group can be consubstantial to it; it is about a place which is “infigurable”, neither outside nor inside; it is about a totally “symbolic instance” which cannot be localizable in reality²⁶. Society, adds Lefort, now finds itself challenged by the loss of fundament, by anarchy, in the sense of having no ground²⁷. Modern democracy is the event of the loss of all anchors of certitude²⁸. Democracy is hence nothing but risk; in Lefort’s words, democracy is “wild” and “savage” since this void place is not only non-domesticable but a place of the non-domesticable. Drawing on his thoughts of the void place symbolically installed by democratic

revolution we would like to argue that new totalitarian formations, in our new liberal democratic age, not only “give place to institutions, modes of totalitarian organization and representation”, but are aggressive attempts to conquer, to occupy and invade the symbolic order of the void of the One, of anarchy, or space of indetermination, which is the symbolic order of freedom. An important lesson from Tocqueville, which orients in some senses Lefort’s concept of “wild democracy”, is the “ambiguities of the democratic revolution”²⁹ in every domain of social reality when “equality” of conditions rather than freedom become the axial force of revolution. Social bonds, political institutions, individuals, mechanisms of opinion, forms of sensibility and forms of knowledge, religion, right, language, literature, history, etc, everywhere the democratic revolution practices, in Lefort’s words, “a kind of digging into the flesh of the social”³⁰. It is the digging of the tremendous ambiguity of, on the one hand, being no long subjected to ancient nets of dependence, liberated from minority and thereby free to self-determination and autonomy, as Kant famously proclaimed, vowed to freedom of judgement and acting according to the own rules but, on the other, having no anchors of certitude, searching for agglutination with the many in the attempt to escape from the dissolution of her identity; on the one hand, conquering her right to expression and communication and, on the other, subjecting herself to an anonymous power. “The new affirmation of the singular is erased under the reign of the anonymous; the affirmation of difference (of beliefs, opinions, costumes) under the reign of uniformity; the spirit of novelty becomes sterile in its “jouissance” of material goods; everywhere the pulverization of historical time; the recognition of the semblable by the semblable get damaged with the emergence of society as abstract entity”³¹. Equality of conditions equating uniformization, homogenization; instead of the monarchic embodiment of the one, the emergence of the one- dimensionality of every separated and differentiated one. For Lefort, this ambiguity, inherent to the void place opened by the symbolic murder of the One, is the gift of modern democracy, gift in the double sense of present and poison. Thus, it is from this void that both totalitarian formations and plural forms of resistance and struggle for liberation of oppressive conditions arise.³² To the socialist phenomenologist Lefort, freedom is in its heart desire for being. These conditions must however be “deciphered” through a work of detachment from dominant and rival ideologies³³.

In both Arendt’s exercises of political thought on the void of resistance and Lefort’s thoughts on the mutation of the symbolic order operated by modern democracy in which the One is replaced by nothing, we find some answers to the question of how and why new liberal democracies not only “elect” fascist and extreme right politics but how this new form of fascism is perhaps the most violent form of conquest, of occupation and invasion of the symbolic order of a void place. In this sense, we can speak of *fascism ex nihilo*.

How to conquer a void? How to occupy it, how to invade it? For sure, by crashing it. In a very surprising text from 1897, the French poet Paul Valéry address these questions in terms of the conquest of the vague and haphazard place of creation. The void is a recurrent motive in Valéry's poetics, understood as the force of what does not exist³⁴. It appears as O. in his notions of the vague, of chance, of the blank paper. In the article I am referring to, called *Une Conquête Méthodique*, [A Conquest by Method]³⁵, Valéry grasps the phenomenon of "total obedience, the constant devotion to some simple, jealous, and formidable conception – strategic in form, economic in aim, and scientific in its deep preparation and in the extent of its preparation"³⁶ which defines the event called Germany after Bismarck, Germany as the name which epitomizes a new world order, the order of technical-industrial capitalism, the world totally "made by" this order, the order of the "made by". He depicts this total obedience and devotion as an "action" which differs from "ours" liberal democratic, in the sense of individual actions sometimes independent, sometimes contradictory, one regarding the other blindly protected by the State. The new order of total obedience is rather "a massive power that acts like water, now by shock and fall, now by irresistible infiltration"³⁷. The movement is geological and uncontrollable. Through this geological metaphor, Valéry describes the formation of an "economic army", ruled by a tremendous discipline which is capable to connect individual action to the action of the whole, so that each isolated point is totally connected to all points of this potency so that the maximum of wealth from all points of the world can return to every of its parts³⁸. It is the discipline that results in "total obedience". This action, argues Valéry, is not by any chance; it is "trained", it involves the whole body of knowledge, which must suffer a tremendous revolution, the revolution of specialization, the development of a society of experts, the experience of "continuous reason", the incorporation of knowledge into industrial production. Every knowledge must become applicable. And everything must follow knowledge redefined as applicability. Science must become applied science. The human genius is completely replaced by a humanity driven by a constant desire, a mediocre reason totally confident in reason. "This man will do what is required. He will reflect without passion, he will carry out enumerations so complete and reviews so general "that all objects and facts will serve him, and finally enter into his personal calculations"³⁹. This is only possible because this nation, meaning in the text Germany, has done in the economic sphere the experience of "unremitting reason", to say, of "method". It is the methodic conquest of the conquest by method. Valéry describes as a visionary the roots of totalitarianism as a "conquest by method" of all domains of existence, conducted by the formation of an economic army, that is, of how economy compels by its own structure militarization and total mobilization, and hence how economic and military are irresistibly infiltrated⁴⁰. And the law is: "plan and bring about inequality"⁴¹. In a more literal translation, inequality must be organized.

Therefore everything is about method: the future and the possible must be calculated; the studies of probability and statics dominate every domain of study, thus the work of chance and the poetics of the vague – that is every void, the force of the non-existent in existence, must be eliminated; from the military point of view, inequality is organized through number, the more weapons, the more armies, the more soldiers as possible, the goal is the biggest and biggest wholes ; commercially, through the market, whose work is to produce the less expensive product, the search is for the smallest and smallest, to each single on. The mystery of each one, of inequality must be organized both by extension – more and more and by reduction – smallest and smallest, an organization that has to be accomplished macroscopically and microscopically. Both, the military and the commerce aim to “crash all resistance”⁴². Inequality means here the ambiguity of the singular in its incomparability which as number is organized in homogeneity building new hierarchies of power and order. Following the method of continuous reasoning, which becomes the method for every possible method, each branch of knowledge is submitted to total analysis, every culture, every territory, and science proceeds as strategic knowledge: war is made in every simple domain of life. The tremendous isomorphism between the military form and the economic form transforms knowledge into applicability, indeed into “research” and “rapport”. “...Segmentation, classification, the imposition of discipline on the objects of knowledge is the reigning principle”⁴³. Instead of inventing the form of an object, the research inquires: “this form is given by the taste of the future consumer”⁴⁴. One of the outcomes of this militarization and economization of knowledge , of the spirit, of art and literature, of singular existence as Valéry stresses, is not only total obedience but the disappearance of a gap, of a void for disobedience, for the extraordinary, which for Valéry is intimately connected to the experience of how the vague and chance works, for their “poetics” – indeed for how the action is *in actu*, the disappearance of a sensibility for how action acts, how creation creates, how thinking thinks, and last but not least for how theory theorizes. Indeed, in the regime of the conquest of the void by method, what disappears is the void of resistance, of revolution, which is the void for emerging the conditions for an advent of freedom. That is why, he considers, that to resist the methodic conquest of the void, whose aim is to render void the creative energy of the void, it is also necessary a “theory of theory”⁴⁵.

The conquest by method of the void can be expanded as the birth of modern bureaucracy if we accord to bureaucracy the meaning proposed by Lefort in his early works as the formation of a new ruling class. Departing from Marx’s and Weber’s accounts on bureaucracy, Lefort defines bureaucracy as a process, the process of bureaucratization in which a new social structure grows. Contrary to Marx who considered bureaucracy a “parasite phenomenon”, Lefort sees it a “necessary” phenomenon insofar as it is a type of organization not only of the state but of the whole civil

society. If he can agree with Weber's reflections in what concerns the way bureaucracy effectuates the depersonalization of the individual, renders every affair public, transforms the finality of the state – of the apparatus – into private finality, and is a fundamental axe in the process of capitalist rationalization, he insists critically that Weber did not recognize the constitutive traits of bureaucracy rooted in its social structure. Bureaucracy, which reached according to him its utmost “perfection” in soviet totalitarian regime is the formation of a new social dominant class and a new form of domination as well. By means of bureaucracy the whole society becomes politized, indeed everything becomes political in a way that politics lose its meaning. It embodies by means of a disembodied power another class oppression, another effectuation of power⁴⁶.

Lefort has the merit to have shown how the bureaucratic machine works for building a new social organization, with a new ruling class, and his analyses are helpful to see that new fascist “leaders” are bureaucrats which act as simulacra of leaders. Bureaucracy is a machine of simulation, a “mask of law and of impersonality” behind which it is possible to attest to a “proliferation of unproductive functions, a game of personal relations and the delirium of authority”⁴⁷. It is a machine that works dispersing infinitely activities in uncountable services, departments, paperwork, in continuous new structuring, new polices, new formulas, shattering everything, for the sake of ruling if it did not rule, as an invisible ruler impossible to be killed. This can be understood in the sense that instead of incorporating the symbolic order of the One in the monarch, in the one body or nation, bureaucracy becomes a power which conquer, occupy and invade the void place of democracy with an abstract machine of papers, formulas, instances, of a system in which the one who is ruled by superior instances becomes herself a ruler, so that power is structured by the ruling of the being ruled. The bureaucrat is always a being-ruled who gest a small power capable to submit, subject and destroy individual life.

The bureaucratic machine is necessarily technocratic, or at least must appear as technocratic, in the sense of possessing and thereby legitimating itself with technical expertise and the demand of development of competency. The bureaucratic-technocratic machine is the analogical version of automation and automation the most totalitarian formation aiming to conquer the void place of democracy. What the recent rise of extreme right-wing movements, unthinkable without the cybertechnology of information, present is the rule of *cyberocracy*, the high technological unfolding of bureaucratic-technocratic rule. In the amplitude of a new form of power in which the being-ruled is what (called who) rules, autonomy and automation coincides: autonomy becomes automation and automation autonomous. The developing of technologies of automation which correspond to the unfolding of technologies of information into cyberocracy is crucial to understanding the rise of extremism in the 21 century⁴⁸. This huge matter deserves, of course, special discussion. What interests us is

why these new forms of right-wing extremism arising from and performing the cyberocracy of extreme new liberal democracy should be called fascist. Thus, if it is about extremism then it should be acknowledged that it is new liberal democracy that is extreme and these new “movements” can be seen as the very extremism of new liberal democracy.

In a previous work in which I tried to justify why we should speak about a new form of fascism rather than any other label, I accounted for the inspiration I received from the writings of Pier Paolo Pasolini and how he inspires us to think⁴⁹. Pasolini insisted in calling new liberal democracy a new form of fascism. The predicative discursive act here involved: new liberal democracy *is* a new fascism, which is considered by many a great provocation and by others a big mistake. But Pasolini departs from a comparative procedure in relation to the past – with historical fascism which he called “paleofascism” and from the stereotypical ideological beliefs. He departs from a cine-poetic vision of the contemporary moment. He also departs from a vision of the void. But this time, of the void of resistance, understood as the disappearance of resistance, something that can be thought together with Valéry’s notion of “total obedience” which in its turn is accomplished by cyberocracy. Pasolini differs from Lefort who saw in May 68 a concrete experience of the emergence of a gap, a *brèche*⁵⁰, the opening of a space of resistance in which the democratic “play of possibilities”, of its rhythm rendered possible to envisage in the closeness of cybersociety, the openness of being, the principial non-achievement of everything.⁵¹ Pasolini saw everywhere signs of the void of resistance when resistance insisted in restoring historical forms of resistance. It is not about a pessimist vision contra an optimist. It is rather about the urgency he saw of inventing new forms of resistance. The new form of fascism he recognized as new liberal democracy, structured on a mutation of capitalism itself, on cybertechnological “revolution”, on mass media consumption is unpredictably new because it captured resistance imposing the restoration and repetition of forms of resistance. Thereby it empties resistance, replacing it with a form, following the logic of the form of merchandise. Pasolini recognizes this novelty through his senses, when experiencing the disappearance of fireflies in the Italian landscape which are for him flashing lights of resistance to the extermination of life within life which broadly defines fascism. In his narration, “something had happened”, which I suggest can be understood as the event of the mutation of everything into “whatsoever”, indeed a continuous whatsoever of everything, indeed a process of rendering every sense, meaning and value empty of sense, meaning and value when transformed in whatsoever sense, meaning, and value. I called this a process of ambiguation of every sense, meaning and value, in which resistance and that what is to be resisted confounds, mix, loses any content. The emptying of the sense and meaning of people, of life, of the human, of existence, of sensibility, of the body, of soul, of politics, through their circulation, exacerbation, short, ambiguation

is in fact the emptying of the sense of sense itself, of the value of value, of the truth of truth⁵².

The void of resistance perceived by Pasolini is for sure to be understood as the activity of nihilism itself. Thus, nihilism as Nietzsche so deeply saw is not a state but an activity, an activity that both activates and pacifies at the same time the void of senses and values. “God is dead”, “everything is permitted”, these almost proverbial nihilistic utterances do not say merely that the structure of meaning, and values is disrupted and dissolved, leaving the world solely in a vacuum of meaning and value. They can only be said from within a general economy of meanings, senses, and values which, through continuous ambiguity. It is from this voiding activity that fascism arises as the accomplishment of new techno-mass medial liberal, cyberocratic democracy. Understood in this sense, it becomes clearer what Pasolini called “cultural genocide”, “anthropological mutation”, and “loss of linguistic ability” as the decisive features of this new form of fascism. The void of resistance seen and sensed by Pasolini in the disappearance of the fireflies in the landscape is about the emptying of senses, meaning and values, which structures a new form of socialization which destroys social reality but above all reality itself.

Thus, at stake in what I am calling “the fascism of ambiguity” is the destruction of reality. Cyberocracy, the automation of bureau-technocracy, replaces reality with simulacra, with forms of contents which empties contents and not only forms without contents. It belongs to it the complete fixation on images and not least on self-images. There is a lot of talk about ‘image fixation’. Historical fascism needs strong images, meaningful figures and symbols, the image of Führers, Duces, the leader must be in public places, public places must be rebuilt as a monumental architecture to reinforce the ideal of strength. Symbols must form a bond of identity that must touch everyone in such a way that everyone can identify with the leader, with the nation, with a mythologized history and an aestheticized memory and thus get a self-image that shares with their own, i.e. which through the same identification process made themselves equal. In newfascism, the fascism of today, the fascist identification process becomes different because it is based on being and identifying first and foremost with one’s own narcissistic self-image, with a media “image”. Here mythologizing is replaced by simulation, everything becomes an *as-if it were itself*: the state exists now “as if” it were a state because it is a business, a corporation; nation exists “as if” it were a nation because it is first and foremost about a “branding”, the leader is “as if” it were a leader because the one who rules, rules in the capacity of being ruled, i.e. being ruled and dominated - by a technological-automating-economic order - is what rules and dominates. Today’s fascist leaders imitate images of previous leaders, the neo-fascists imitate the former fascist, the symbols do not just imitate old symbols but precisely the forms of symbols. In an age like ours where symbols are drained and empty - it is the symbol itself

that is imitated; in a time like ours in which form itself has lost form, it is the form that must be imitated, and this in order to “give the impression” that our formless world has a form, “as if” it had a new form. The new is only the simulation of form, of meaning, of value, of reality. Thus it is by means of showing, performing, viralizing forms of sense which empties the sense of sense, forms of values which empties the value of values, forms of meaning which empties the meaning of meaning, without values, rendering the search for meaning, for sense, for values meaningless, senseless, without value. Fascism no longer needs to impose univocal meaning, univocity; now it appropriates ambiguity, which has been a resistant response after the war [see for example the defense of ambiguity by Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Lévinas, a. O]. Rendering everything ambiguous it is the action of resistance itself which is appropriated and emptied.

Pasolini was very lucid about the appropriation of the actions of resistance by the new form of fascism, by neofascism, as he called it. He followed the various movements of resistance against oppression, as we can see in his work and nonetheless in his documentary work *La Rabbia*⁵³. He grasps the struggle between the language of hate, which is the language of Modernity, the language of oppressive exterminating power, and the language of anger, the language of resistance. Without discussing further here the subtle tension between hate and anger and their languages, it is noteworthy to remark that Pasolini was untiring in his search for a language of resistance against the way he defined neofascism as extermination of resistance something that took place in contemporary forms of annihilating not only the appeal to thought but also the language of experience, sensibility, embodiment.

It is for him about discovering the tiny distinctions between the language of hate and the language of resistance, which new mass media and technological capitalism reduce to the same, imposing the order of ambiguity in whatsoever meaning.⁵⁴ This appeal to distinction what is rendered ambiguous through homogenization according to the capitalist law of “general equivalence”, can be read for instance in another poem, called “Anticommunist Youth Marches in Rome”:

If you shout long live freedom without humility
 you're not shouting long live freedom.
 If you shout long live freedom without laughter,
 you're not shouting long live freedom.
 If you shout long live freedom without love,
 you're not shouting long live freedom.
 You, children of the children, are shouting
 long live freedom
 with contempt, with hatred, with rage.
 So you're not shouting long live freedom!
 There's a true freedom and a lying freedom,

but it's better to be heroes of true freedom.
 Know this, children of the children,
 you who shout long live freedom
 with contempt, with hatred, with rage⁵⁵.

He fought with language against language, film against film, poetry against poetry, scrutinizing thereby how language, sensibility, embodiment are destroyed by the technification, reification, mass-mediatization and consumption of language, sensibility, bodies and thought. His struggling strategies such as writing in a dialect that was not his own, of filming in Africa and India, of repeating Dante's desire of becoming poet in times which not only avoid poetry but witness the void of poetry accomplished by poetry itself, as we can read in his project of writing a Divine Mimesis [*La Divina Mimesis*], as a rewriting of Dante's poem⁵⁶, are in many aspects actions like the one of the innocent young man running through the center of Rome, amidst the intensive traffic, with a flower of paper in the hand, who at the end was killed when a car runed over him, whom Pasolini depicted in his short film, *La Sequenza dei Fiori di Carta*⁵⁷. Also in similar way as Kafka, it is more about reaching the point of no return than trying to reactive, retore or repeat past forms of resistance, to reach the point where our times are already in and discovering the subtle small flowers of difference, spread as wild herbs in the camps of existence, like millions of immigrants, exiled and expulsed nameless bodies lying in the streets of the world.

After the war, in the 60s René Char meditated a lot on the verses by Rimbaud, the poet contemporaneous with the Commune of Paris, which read: *La poésie ne rythmera plus l'action. Elle sera en avant,*, "Poetry will no longer beat *within* action; it *will be before* it"⁵⁸. He also looks back to his years of resistance and reflects on how action is blind and only poetry sees. None of the thinkers discussed here deny action. But they all know that the appeal to action today needs more than action. It needs to act upon action itself, it needs in this sense a "poietics", the difficult task to let poetry be before action since it "sees" the urgency that action act upon itself. It sees that inside the vertiginous exterminating violence of the fascism of ambiguity, it is action itself that must be enacted, that making must be made beyond any idea and practice of production. Poetry, in the old sense of a doing sees that it is the doing itself that must be done. Poetry is before action in the sense that it names the courage to face the void as void, with the courage of becoming oneself like the firefly of Victor Hugo, which keeps hovering even if very briefly over the abyss of our time, the courage to stand in "an absent pillar", [*sur une colonne absente*], like Henri Michaux's trembling lines of presence.

This text is dedicated to Adauto Novaes

- 1 Friedrich Hölderlin. »Je angefochtener wir sind vom Nichts, das, wie ein Abgrund, um uns her uns angähnt, oder auch vom tausendfachen Etwas der Gesellschaft und der Thätigkeit der Menschen, das gestaltlos, seel- und lieblos uns verfolgt, zerstreut, um so leidenschaftlicher und heftiger und gewaltsamer muß der Widerstand von unserer Seite werden. Oder muss er nicht?« Letter to his brother from 2th November 1797. *Sämtliche Werke*. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, begonnen durch N. v. Hellgrath, fortgeführt durch F. Seebass und L. v. Pigenot, 2. Bd. (1794-1798), Berlin, 2. Aufl. 1923, S. 420.
- 2 Michael Löwy. "Dix thèses sur l'extrême droite en Europe" in: *Les nouveaux droits extrêmes*, Lignes 45, octobre 2014, p. 163.
- 3 This is a quote by the conservative journalist John O' Sullivan, <https://quadrant.org.au/magazine/2022/10/national-conservatism-the-return-of-the-repressed/>
- 4 Gérard Granel. "The Thirties Are Still Before Us: Logical Analysis of the Concrete Situation", *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* Volume 25, Number 1, 2004, p. 117.
- 5 Hannah Arendt, "The Seeds of a Fascist International", in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: formation, exile, and totalitarianism*. 1. pbk ed. New York: Schocken; 2005. p. 150.
- 6 Enzo Traverso. *The New Faces of Fascism*, London/Ny: Verso, 2019, p. 4
- 7 Alberto Toscano. Notes on Late Fascism, April 2, 2017, <https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/notes-on-late-fascism/>
- 8 Michael Löwy in the cited article considers that this extreme right is very diversified, op. cit., p. 163. Despite so many different labels and different origins, they have in fact the same shape: they are all not only nationalist, chauvinist, xenophobic, racist, hate for whatsoever "other", antisemite, extra-Europeans, sexists, homophobes, misogynists, etc, but are "shaped" digitally, virtually.
- 9 Theodor W. Adorno. "The Meaning of Working through the Past", in *Critical Models: Intervention and Catchwords*, ed. Lydia Goher, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, p. 90.
- 10 The concept of Cyberocracy was coined by Dennis David Ronfeld in a memorandum written 1978 and developed in a paper from 1985 for internal uses of RAND corporation, "an organization formed immediately after World War II to connect military planning with research and development decisions". "Cyberocracy, Cyberspace, and Cyberology: Political Effects of the Information Revolution" 1991, RAND Corporation. Retrieved 12 Dec 2014.
- 11 Hannah Arendt. *Between Past and Future*. New York: The Viking Press, 1961.
- 12 René Char, "Feuillets d'Hypnos" in *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1983, p. 190.
- 13 See also Andrey Platonov's novel "The Return" in *The Return and Other Stories*, London: The Harvill Press, I thank Tora Lane for drawing my attention to this novel by Platonov and also Irina Sandomirskaja for her inspiring thoughts on "post" condition developed in her seminars on "anachronism" at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (Cbees), at Södertörn University, Sweden.
- 14 Hannah Arendt, op. Cit., p. 9
- 15 *Er, He*, the English translation by Willa and Erwin Muir appeared for the first time in English in *The Great Wall of China*, NY, 1946. For the German Original, see Franz Kafka. *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol 5,
- 16 Hannah Arendt, op. Cit., p. 10
- 17 *ibidem*
- 18 Sigmund Freud. The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud Vol. 21 (1927-1931) *The future of an illusion* ; Civilization and its discontents and other works. Repr. London: Hogarth; 1964[1961].
- 19 Hannah Arendt, op. Cit., p. 12.
- 20 Franz Kafka. <http://www.kafka.org/index.php?ohg>
- 21 Paul Celan *Der Meridian: Endfassung, Entwürfe, Materialien*. 1. Aufl. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp; 1999, eng. version *The meridian: final version - drafts - materials*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press; 2011.
- 22 Hannah Arendt, op. cit., p. 15.
- 23 *ibidem*
- 24 *ibidem*, p. 17. See also, "La question de la démocratie" in: *Essais sur le politique*, XIX-XXe siècle, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1986, p. 27. Lefort's concept of mutation is very much indebted to the work of Adauto Novaes in Brazil, cf. <https://artepensamento.ims.com.br>
- 25 *ibidem*, p. 18.
- 26 *ibidem*, p. 18
- 27 The French political philosopher Miguel Abensour has shown the connection between Claude Lefort's thoughts on wild democracy and Reiner Schürmann's concept of anarchy, see for instance, "Démocratie sauvage" et "principe d'anarchie" ' in *Les Cahiers de Philosophie* 18 (Lille) (1994), eng. version "'Savage democracy and 'principle of anarchy'" in *Journal for Philosophy & Social Criticism*, Volume 28, Issue 2
- 28 Claude Lefort, " La question de la démocratie", op. cit., p. 30
- 29 *ibidem*, p. 24
- 30 *ibidem*. Lefort used Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh in order to conceptualize the body disembodied of the symbolic order of the One.
- 31 *ibidem*, p. 25.
- 32 *ibidem*, p. 17.

- 33 Ibidem, Lefort was a double critical of both right and left radical positions and of their rivalry.
- 34 “Que serions-nous donc sans le secours de ce qui n'existe pas?” in: “Petite lettre sur les mythes”, *Oeuvres I*, Paris: Gallimard, 1957, Paul Valéry, p. 966
- 35 Paul Valéry, “Une Conquête méthodique” in *Oeuvres I*, op. cit., eng. Version Paul Valéry, “A Conquest by Method” in: *History and Politics*, transl. by Denise Folliot and Jackson Mathews, in *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, Volume 10, NY: Bollingen Foundation, 1962. In the following, page numbers are referred to the English version.
- 36 Eng p. 48
- 37 Ibidem, p. 49
- 38 Ibidem, p. 48-49.
- 39 Ibidem, 52
- 40 It is obvious that the Minister of Defense “chosen” by Putin must be an economist.
- 41 Paul Valéry, op. Cit., p. 54
- 42 Ibidem, p. 55.
- 43 Ibidem, 62
- 44 Ibidem
- 45 Ibidem.
- 46 Claude Lefort. *Eléments d'une critique de la bureaucratie*, Genève/Paris: Librairie Droz, 1971, p. 308.
- 47 Ibidem, p. 303.
- 48 The to an extent that we could speak of “extremist midiasphere”, see João Cezar de Castro Rocha. <https://portalcioranbr.wordpress.com/2024/02/25/dissonancia-cognitiva-coletiva-e-midiosfera-extremista-joao-cezar-de-castro-rocha-democracia-em-perspectiva-ppgh-uerj/>
- 49 See my *The Fascism of Ambiguity*, London: Bloomsbury, 2022.
- 50 1968, Lefort, together with Edgar Morin and Jean-Marc Coudray wrote a reflection on May 68 aiming to develop a theory at the eye of the hurricane. See Morin E, Lefort C, Coudray J. *Mai 1968: la brèche : premières réflexions sur les événements*. Paris: Fayard; 1968. Twenty years later, 1988, they edited anew the former reflection adding another one twenty years later, now with Cornelius Castoriadis also as co-editor, see, Morin E, Castoriadis C, Lefort C. *Mai 68: la brèche : suivi de Vingt ans après*. Bruxelles: Éditions Complexe; 1988. In his own reflections after 20 years, Lefort writes that 68 was about “...the opening of a gap that ensures a new circulation of individuals and a new exchange of thoughts. This is one of the faces of the revolutionary phenomenon. I don't light it to celebrate wild democracy. I am not unaware of its ambiguous nature, the danger that it entails in failing to ignore the symbolic articulations that command the link with reality, the relationship with others, the distinction between the registers of thought and language, whatever the social system. In May 68 I find the sign of what appears to me in the revolution, on the one hand, as innovation or renewal, emergence of a new public space, liberation, and, on the other, as confusion or dissolution of the fundamental references of social life. Those who retain only burlesque behaviors and speeches from May 1968, to ignore the salutary shake-up of conventions, should resume the study of revolutions...”.
- 51 Claude Lefort. “L'idée d'être brut et d'esprit sauvage”, in *Sur une Colline absente autour de Merleau-Ponty*, Paris, Gallimard, 1978, p. 44.
- 52 See, my *The Fascism of Ambiguity*, op. cit.
- 53 See Pier Paolo Pasolini. *La Rabbia*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3GBa09Mg_s and the beautiful essay by George Didi-Huberman. *Film, essai, poème, La Rabbia, de Pier Paolo Pasolini*.
- 54 See Pasolini's Poem, “Gerarchia”, in *Da Trasumanar e organizzar* (1971).
- 55 Pasolini. “Anticommunist Youth Marches in Rom” in *La Rabbia/Anger*, transl. Cristina Vitti, Tenement Press, 2022, <https://lithub.com/two-poems-by-pier-paolo-pasolini-translated-by-cristina-viti/>
- 56 Pasolini, *La divina mimesis* (Milano: Mondadori, 2019).
- 57 <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=pasolini+sequenzi+di+un+fiori+di+carta&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:d4c55401,vid:7Fst4xc6xc8,st:0>
- 58 Arthur Rimbaud. Letter to Paul Demeny, from 15 May 1871, <https://my-blackout.com/2019/03/03/arthur-rimbaud-letters-1870-18719-sean-bonney-letter-on-poetics-after-rimbaud/>

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