

## ***In the Beginning There Was Chaos and Rhythm***

by OBSOLETE CAPITALISM

### **Abstract**

In the 80s of the XX century some philosophical and artistic events marked the irruption of what can be defined as a late-twentieth-century version of ‘divergent subjectivity’. Such subjectivity experimented new forms of life that express political and artistic projects different from those of the revolutionary 70s. These new modes of existence, accelerated by the scandal of truth, became autonomous and radical expressions in the research of an authentic self-organized form of life: “an existence that seeks a physiognomy to reveal itself” (Klossowski 2019). Through works like *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari 1987), *Foucault* (Deleuze 1988a) and *The Courage of Truth* (Foucault 2011) where the Deleuzian concept of “artistic will” (vouloir-artiste) lies, it will be possible to re-read *chaos-operas*<sup>1</sup> like *Learning to Cope With Cowardice* (Mark Stewart & The Maffia 1983), *In the Beginning There Was Rhythm* (The Slits 1980), and the musical pictography *Piano Piece for David Tudor 4* (Sylvano Bussotti 1970), the last one parodistically ushering in the new decade on the front page of Deleuze and Guattari’s plateau entitled *Rhizome*.

### **Introduction: the libertine graphic rhizome**

Repetition in music is often an animated interior expression, sometimes a basic form called refrain.<sup>2</sup>

Sylvano Bussotti

It is very likely that the incipit of *Introduction: Rhizome* in *A Thousand Plateaus* can be regarded as one of the most famous and paradoxical of the contemporary philosophy: «The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 3). Equally shocking is the axial short

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<sup>1</sup> The expression “Chaos-Opera” is taken from the work of the French poet, writer, philosopher, and literary critic Édouard Glissant (1928-2011), who was strongly influenced by the concepts expressed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In particular, Édouard Glissant believes that the Chaos-Opéra is «a form of expression that since its start finds its measure in a sort of excess ... A “Chaos-opéra” occurs when jazz is no longer jazz, trembling is not only trembling and improvisation finds its common space and its path» (our translation). For further knowledge see *Revue des schizo-analyses, Chimères*, n. 90, *Avec Édouard Glissant* (2017) and the website [edouardglissant.fr](http://edouardglissant.fr).

<sup>2</sup> Quotation from Scarlini (2010).

circuit that figures in the reproduced musical score of Sylvano Bussotti's *Piano Piece for David Tudor 4* and the text of the rhizome philosophical plane itself. The score opens the passage as the choral "expressiveness" and founding element of a new complex vectorial space. What meaning can one assume in such malicious vicinity? A simple composition of choruses, a corresponding Lied for each plane?

According to this perspective, Bussotti's score would not just have an aesthetic function beside the actual text, but also a more subtle function as starting point in the single cycle of the plateau. A sort of philosophical *Liederkreise*, which presents itself like an extra-text perceived as a textual variation of the rhizomatic narrative theme which bursts into the Rhizome text itself in a bold and libertine way. Sylvano Bussotti's score is therefore a "text" within the book's philosophical context, its actual incipit. It is a rhizome explained not through a grammar of words and of concepts, but through a grammar of sounds mediated by artistic musical signs. Surely *Piano Piece for David Tudor 4* cannot be defined as a *Lied*. The answer centred around the representativeness of Sylvano Bussotti's score, seen as the crucial argument for the intrinsic musicality of *A Thousand Plateaus*, does not exhaust the ultimate sense of its insertion as incipit of an essentially anti-representative work. Hence, a spontaneous question arises: does the Bussottian score enter the secret rooms of the Refrain as an indication of Chaosmos that *A Thousand Plateaus* shows in its every fibre? In other words, is it an esoteric sign indicating a precise path, an opening that awaits the reader on the edge of a *chora* without shape nor background?

*Piano Piece for David Tudor 4* sends vibrations throughout the whole book. A "principal refrain" and not just an über-refrain summing up all the other ones disseminated in the pages of the book, but rather an integral part of «a sort of cosmic *Sprechgesang*» (Deleuze 2006: 311). An atom, or a small root of concept, not only because it is set in that specific favorable point, but because it exhibits in its own dimension a Refrain in the Rhizosphere-plot, which emerges from the text and connects with other dimensions so to open a virgin territory, an actual plane of immanence, which reverberates and proclaims an image of thought allied with chaos. *Piano Piece for David Tudor 4* is then a Chaos-Opera reflecting and proliferating inside another bigger Chaos-Opera, *A Thousand Plateaus* which in turn "speaks in music" to other dormant Chaos-Operas that are «screeches around which concepts develop their songs» (Deleuze 2006: 311).

«Il y a des cris intellectuels, des cris qui proviennent de la finesse des moelles» («There are intellectual cries, cries which proceed from the delicacy of the marrow»), writes Artaud in *Situation of the Flesh* (Artaud 1965: 58), a short text quoted by Bussotti at the beginning of *Pièces de chair II*, an Artaudian cycle composed between 1958 and 1960, whose fourteenth track is precisely *Piano Piece for David Tudor 4* written in 1959 (Bussotti 1970). Same cries, same pieces of flesh, or philosophical principles, which bring together Artaud, Bussotti and Deleuze: stochastic processes that compose «ritornellos, lieder, corresponding to each plateau» (Deleuze 2006: 311) and whose secret executions will remain in the hands of future pianists and musicians.

## Flesh-thought

The «metaphysics of the flesh» as Derrida named it in his study of Artaud's *Situation of the Flesh* (Derrida 1978) was extensively adopted in a completely different socio-political context by other artistic expressions founded on the assumption of the repossession of the body. This seizing back happens through a direct relation between flesh as cry-thought and the mode of existence. It manifests itself through an unconditional sonic antagonism whereby cries, spasms, lacerations and signs become again part of a feral life. The wild experience of an entirely female and uncompromising Londoner punk group like The Slits with all the implications that such a radical gender choice bears in a 1977 totally macho and sexist environment – is its most evident proof. The flesh, not just as cry but also as sensibility and impulse, tells how in The Slits' experience «an uncompromising absolute» (Prinzi 2013 : 35) means the expropriation of the flesh from its daily trade, from its exchange as general equivalent, and from its function of erotic lust. To them, grown on punk stages and under spotlights as expression of the de-castration of a loud minority among spits, cries and riots, applies what Artaud wrote: «Je ferai du con sans la mère une âme obscure, totale, obtuse, et absolue » (Artaud 1946). The comparison between the flesh put in music by Sylvano Bussotti in *Pièces de chair II*, full of aesthetic eroticism, and the flesh machined by The Slits in *Cut*, full of hostile, bold and insolent eroticism, might seem reckless. However, the common result reached by irreverence and the need to cease with any traditional music scheme, is the same. A secret Rhythm links The Slits and Sylvano Bussotti through two different modes of operation. The first is the use of 'sexual' topics to overthrow the manierism not of the sound or of composing modes, but of the authoring figure within the social plane. The second is the use of 'cries' as an irrepressible and instinctive physical phenomenon, through which the flesh-thought exhibits and articulates itself, coming finally out of the grey cerebral and spiritual area and entering the incandescent dimension where the fibers of the widespread flesh catch fire. Once the body has been freed, its impure cry borderline with noise, rises, becoming with no mediation a political body as «instrument of knowledge and rebellion» (Artaud 2002: 15). Both the world of academic culture and contemporary music for Bussotti, and the world of pop culture and mass media for The Slits must have feared much consternation to the idea that such nomad, erotic and nocturnal poetry «would emerge from books – or albums – and overthrow reality» (Artaud 2001: 223). As the musicologist Mario Bortolotto argues, the bewildering release by Universal in 1959 of the only score cycle of *Five Pieces for David Tudor* gave the Florence-based composer the reputation of outlaw, and it raised hard resentment against him for decades (Bortolotto 1969: 210-211).

Needless to say that what could appear as reprehensible in the golden and comfortable environment of Darmstadt-based Western musical élite in 1959 – that is, the release of musical notations with pictorial scores in the line of Cagean indeterminacy with regards to executions – appeared completely banned from the opposite musical environment of

London in 1977. The outrageous scandal of The Slits was in fact ordinary, a habit which scrambled up to the highest step of the pyramid mediated by information. It went far beyond the musical and artistic environment to reach the social world turning itself into new life forms that still today lie outside any conventional scheme, especially the female ones. In that context of “female denaturalization” The Slits advanced a brave stylistic variation. In a few years, the Slit-sound drove the *riot-grrls* to abandon the musical hive dense of incessantly fast rhythms and guitars and to take an impervious route, incompatible with old accelerations but more inclined towards slow and syncopated rhythms of the Black Atlantic – those rhizomatic lines of a mingled sound that favors obstinate bass of Jamaican matrix.

Other artists and groups start to converge and gather magnetically around this Creole artistic milieu created by The Slits’ *jah-punkitude* – among the most relevant and renown, we recall Adrian Sherwood and the label On U Sound, The Pop Group e the label Y, Mark Stewart and the Maffia. In 1980 a single EP seals this convergence of pure lines of protean sound. We are referring to the single produced by Y Records and released by The Slits in conjunction with The Pop Group titled *In the Beginning There Was Rhythm/Where There’s a Will There’s a Way*. For The Pop Group, this was the final track of a stunning career founded on fool unconventionality, whereas for The Slits this was their most significant track.

«God tells you/I am rhythm/God tells you/I’m the roots of life» (The Slits 1980); these words link the sound to the primordial divine element conceived as an extended rhythm-machine; a *natura naturans* perpetually generating and taking on the features of Deleuze’s Nature-Chaosmosis following Nietzsche’s footsteps, as “a rhythmic character with infinite transformations” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 319). Thus, the Earth’s offbeat meets the rhythm generated by the Funk tribal drumming, while the Punk attitude fructifies the Earth and Dub starts its cosmic journey towards Uranus.

*In the Beginning There Was Rhythm* can still be perceived as the soundtrack of the journey towards “the new Earth”, where Chaos and Rhythm meet in a purer state, generating refrains that do not favor the Market or the State, but rather a superior deterritorialization for future Chaos-Operas.

### **Let’s storm the citadel!**

It is only with the debut album of the project by Mark Stewart & The Maffia, *Learning to Cope With Cowardice* that the approach to the interdisciplinarity of genres combined to political poetry of the protest, reaches the dimension of a masterpiece and cornerstone for a new radical geography of sounds. In the 80s most of the artists involved in the punk event were dominated and complemented by it and used to repeat the obsessive ceremonial of those canons of the established genre in the debut season of the late 70s. On the

contrary the artistic heart behind the project Mark Stewart & The Maffia, offers a secret verticality and radical transversality. The secret verticality lies in the prodigality of ascending the punk event, repeating that act in a more dynamic and profound way and not simply carrying out an original removal of such experience.

In other words, the project organizes a repetition that acts in the evolution of the gesture, differentiating nature and freedom of creativity in each significant and crucial points of the artistic project. The radical transversality lies in the explosive drama of a sonorous and poetic cruelty organized by Mark Stewart: every sound and every text evoked with aggressiveness and insolence in *Learning to Cope With Cowardice* causes an imbalance, an instability, an asymmetry that finds its secret order only in the driven effect of the whole album. Artaud and Coltrane, Sex Pistols and Blake, Sugarhill Gang and Nietzsche, King Tubby and Russolo, James Brown and William Burroughs, black voodoo and situationist poetry, they all represent invaluable accents of a Rhythmology like no other.

On *Learning to Cope With Cowardice*'s sonic-sedition Mark steps out on a polyrhythmic path producing dissidence, where all formal symmetries – social, political, aesthetic, artistic, and affective – explode. But the first great symmetry to be destroyed is time and the system of power in Britain itself. The time of coexistence and the environmental co-extensiveness along with the British establishment, represent the first measure to be destroyed. Therefore *Learning to Cope With Cowardice* is a weapon against one's own time. This is perhaps the main dissonance and the most profound and innovative Rhythm of the album. It works like a barrage of machine gun fire against the masks of Power under the cry "Let's storm the Citadel". Such is the new geography of sounds, words and thoughts that Mark Stewart & The Maffia pinpoint: an extreme distortion of milieus turning into a mysterious meeting among Chaos, Earth and Rhythm, in favour of new ways of future existence.

### **Ahistorical universality, vibrating milieus and flat times**

In order to analyze in depth the logic and substance of Mark Stewart and The Maffia's artistic proposal summed in their debut album *Learning to Cope With Cowardice*, we will employ a philosophical approach that does not concern exclusively the chronological dynamic. In fact, we believe that artistic manifestations should not be subjected to a merely temporal and evolutive conception. Artistic events are located outside or beside such conception: their universality is not necessarily historical but certainly cannot be deemed "geographical".

We claim that the universal dimension of the artistic discourse can be equally "spatial", that is, it can take hold of vibrating milieus, highly chaotic and open, crossed by multiple and differentiated vectors that abstractly cut their volumes. Such milieus generate a geographical and mathematical topology where time, which includes all the crossing times of

all discourses, is paradoxically equal to zero, it is suspended, because the time map is flat. The code of persistence, which conveys movements, does not include a temporal dimension. Moreover, the timing of these movements, whether fast or slow, captured on a flat map and complemented by topological codes, conveys only nomadic forces, through lines, curves, directions, reliefs, folds, pits, wrinkles, as well as orogenic and subsidence phenomena. Topological distances and forms, or strong intensive analogies, between different artistic, political, social and philosophical expressions can be contiguous in the same milieu even if they present strong temporal discontinuities, as we will later see.

In fact, only few codes, or trans-codes, belonging to different expressions, will make combined cartography possible. In this expressive cartography, the nearest in time may result as the furthest away. Thus, co-extensity and compresence may not coincide in these milieus. We recall, in fact, that only the response of open milieus that let themselves be permeated by chaos will provide Rhythm with appearance and substance: chaos and Rhythm will only have the interval in common (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 313).

### **The bios as alethurgy**

In order to substantiate the theory of chaos-rhythm, we would like to introduce the philosophical movement called *Kynismus*, as an example of compresence in the same milieu of Mark Stewart – both with regard to the corrosive practice of Pop Group and to the articulate partnership between the Mafia and Mark Stewart. The term originates from the ancient Greek word *kynikos*, which means “like a dog”, and whose root traces back to *kyôn*, dog. From *The Courage to Be* by the German philosopher and theologian Paul Johannes Tillich (Tillich 2000), we adopt the distinction between *Kynismus*, to define ancient Cynicism, and *Zynismus*, which refers instead to contemporary cynicism – which is clearly a degraded and negative version of the former, arguably based on hyper-individualism.

In the present text, we will deal exclusively with *Kynismus*, enunciating its most groundbreaking aspects, following the perspective suggested by Michel Foucault in his last, shocking and dramatic course held in 1984 at the Collège de France, *The Courage of Truth*. As we all know, 1984 is also the year of Foucault’s premature death: the course would then be published posthumous in France in 2009 under the title *Le courage de la vérité*. In his last course, Foucault essentially restores the philosophical movement of *Kynismus*, which had been previously marginalized by the whole history of Western philosophy.

He attributes to ancient Cynicism two remarkable characteristic that he deems intimately connected: the political project and the form of life. The theoretical perspective derived from this combination allows Foucault to inscribe *Kynismus* among the political and artistic revolutionary movements of the XIX and XX centuries. Such perspective, purposely sidestepped by previous commentators and academics, allows Foucault not only

to produce a particularly rich analysis of the cynic phenomenon, which would bring future developments in terms of inorganic life, but also to articulate a vertiginous accelerationist geography.

The latter acquires the peculiar strength of a testimony, considering the circumstances in which it is pronounced and the intellectual circles in which Foucault ascribes it to, and in which it would be henceforth inscribed and appreciated. Let us focus now on how Foucault introduces *Kynismus* in the lecture of 29 February 1984:

It seems to me that in Cynicism, in Cynic practice, the requirement of an extremely distinctive form of life [...] is strongly connected to the principle of truth-telling, of truth-telling without shame or fear, of unrestricted and courageous truth-telling, of truth-telling which pushes its courage and boldness to the point that it becomes intolerable insolence. This connecting up of truth-telling and mode of life, this fundamental, essential connection in Cynicism between living in a certain way and dedicating oneself to telling the truth is all the more noteworthy for taking place immediately as it were, without doctrinal mediation, or at any rate within a fairly rudimentary theoretical framework. (Foucault 2011: 163)

This original interpretation of ancient Cynicism by Foucault is extraordinary compared to his time, to the echo hidden in the folds of rhizomatic thinking and to the different vectors of «the Strong of the Future». In fact, it opens new horizons for autonomous and protean processes of subjectivation that escape worldly selective pressures. He claims that one of the fundamental dimensions of *Kynismus* is the tight bond between «forms of existence» and «manifestations of the truth». While focusing on these two aspects, he surely does not forget the exasperation of individual privacy, this sort of unrestrained individualism divided between a stray life and extreme singularity, conducted by cynic philosophers and their followers.

However, his analysis of *Kynismus* on the basis of this theme of life as scandal of the truth, or of style of life as site of emergence of the truth – bios as alethurgy (Foucault 2011: 180) – makes unexpectedly visible and productive to us new research paths and a series of topics, which in recent philosophical history are absolutely unprecedented in terms of rhizomatic wealth.

### **Angelic and catascopic function of Chaos-canes**

Ancient philosophers linked to Cynicism operate, then, in Chaos as an underlying space, and they are somehow their *canes*. They act as guard dogs of Chaos, restoring for themselves a catascopic social form – catascopic comes from *Kataskopos*, which in ancient Greek military formations was the person charged with the tasks of exploring and scouting – he was the spy sent in reconnaissance «to observe as unobtrusively as possible what

the enemy is doing» (Foucault 2011: 167). Such exercise of sighting and accounting is attributed to Cynic philosophers by Epictetus in his famous chapter 22, *On Cynicism*, from the 3rd book of his *Discourses*, to which Foucault refers extensively in his lecture of 29 February 1984:

This [of the *Kataskopos*] is the metaphor Epictetus employs here, since he says that the Cynic is sent ahead as a scout, in advance of humanity, to determine what may be favorable or hostile to man in the things of the world. The Cynic's function [will be to locate] the enemy armies and where we might find, where we might meet with points of support or aid which will benefit us in our struggle. For this reason, the Cynic, sent ahead as a scout, will not be able to have shelter, a home, or even a country. He is the man who roams, who runs ahead of humanity. (Foucault 2011: 167)

His universal positive catascopic function goes even further, since the nomadic force of his own roaming drives him towards a magnetic return, after having scrupulously inspected chaos as underlying space. At this point in the *katascopos'* return a sharp transformation happens, and his practical function changes from catascopic to parrhesiastic. Let us follow such extraordinary evolution in Foucault's words:

And after this roaming, this running ahead of humanity, after having carefully observed and accomplished his task as *kataskopos*, the Cynic must return. He will return to announce the truth to announce true things without, Epictetus adds, letting himself be paralyzed by fear. We have here the very definition of parrhesia as the exercise of telling men the truth, announcing it without ever being overcome by fear. (Foucault 2011: 167)

Scouting and antagonistic functions – truth as scandal, frank insolence and wild presence within a certain mode of life – would universally encounter in ancient times wide circulation and lasting success. In fact, still at the time of Emperor Julian, the social cynic phenomenon was so well established and ramified that it became the target of his invectives contained in the pamphlet *To The Cynic Heraclius*.

### **Sovereignty and authenticity through full coherence between life and discourse**

Thanks to Foucault's innovative and groundbreaking analysis, a strictly positive evaluation of ancient Cynicism starts to emerge in detail. If parrhesia, even for Socrates, is «made true» by the aforementioned homophony between mode of life and right to speak freely, in the *Kynismus* Foucault observes an even more radical take on the aspect of "speaking freely connected to the mode of life". This is thanks to the direct, outrageous and unmediated attitude of Cynic philosophers.



Their objective is to attack the «false currency» of their times – namely the culture, the society and any institutionally recognized form, so to reach a peculiar and bizarre unlimited sovereignty beyond institutions and at the margins of society. An unlimited sovereignty that anticipates future political projects, because it allows to denounce culture as «selective process of marking» in favour of a more general and systematic primary gregariousness (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 344). Surely, after a more careful and studied reading, we cannot ignore the Foucaultian vibrato traceable in such aesthetics of existence and the consequent catasopic and parrhesiastic function, in the sense of a break up from the bottom, with respect to Nietzsche who observes the obsolescence of the parrhesiastic philosopher as «doctor of civilization», whose task is to diagnose the becoming of each passing present, and of the interpretation that Klossowski and Deleuze make of their respective works.

In fact, what could Deleuze mean when he wrote that Rimbaud had already said everything on the perspective of the «becoming-minor» of the «inferior being» – orphan, anarchic and atheist? «I have always been of an inferior race ... I am of an inferior race for all eternity... [...] I am a beast, a Negro» (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 105). Or, still, when Deleuze and Guattari in the *Anti-Œdipus* link Zarathustra to the «Great Politics» and to

the bringing to life of the races that leads Nietzsche to say, I'm not a German, I'm Polish. [...] "I am Prado, I am also Prado's father. I venture to say that I am also Lesseps ... I wanted to give my Parisians, whom I love, a new idea – that of a decent criminal. I am also Chambige – also a decent criminal ... The unpleasant thing, and one that nags at my modesty, is that at root every name in history is I". (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 86)

Or, again, when Deleuze and Guattari connect the schizo-revolutionary pole to the mutation pursuing «the line of escape of desire», which is radically different from the sedentary lifestyle of superior classes and races, quoting Rimbaud again:

I am not your kind, I belong eternally to the inferior race, I am a beast, a black. Good people say that we must not flee, that to escape is not good, that it isn't effective, and that one must work for reforms. But the revolutionary knows that escape is revolutionary [...]. (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 279)

Foucault is absolutely conscious, in the ballet of history and places, of all this delirium and of all these forms of power that present themselves from the pretentiously high stand of inferiority, ugliness, dirtiness and immorality:

there was, in fact, a fairly powerful current of impiety in Cynicism, or at any rate of unbelief and skepticism concerning the gods and some religious practices [...] The Cynic is the man with the staff, the beggar's pouch, the cloak, the man in sandals or bare feet, the man with the long beard, the dirty man [...] and he is also a beggar. [...]

To be able to play the role of truth teller and scout, one must be free of all attachments.  
(Foucault 2011: 172)

The role of impious scout of society, according to Foucault, cannot be separated from the job of clearing, reducing and annihilating «all the pointless obligations which everyone usually acknowledges and accepts» (Foucault 2011: 172), in order to reveal the truth. Foucault has an extraordinary intuition. He links this «reductive function» of *Kynismus*, independent, free and exercised in the cities and in the public spaces at the margin of institutional establishments, to the political projects of the XIX and XX century.

Therefore, two kinds of Cynicism would be at work here: a historical one, acknowledged but marginalized and downgraded to an inferior role by the official philosophical culture of each current time, and a trans-historical one, secret and outrageous, fed with revolutionary practices.

### **Militantism and trans-historical Kynismus**

Cynicism understood as form of life in the scandal of the truth [...] would no longer be found in religious practices and institutions, but in political practices. Here, of course, I am thinking of revolutionary movements, or at least of some of these movements, which you know, moreover, borrowed a lot from the different, orthodox and other forms of Christian spirituality. Cynicism, the idea of a mode of life as the irruptive, violent, scandalous manifestation of the truth is and was part of revolutionary practice and of the forms taken by revolutionary movements throughout the nineteenth century. (Foucault 2011: 183)

Henceforth, according to Foucault, trans-historical cynicism is conveyed through XIX and XX century political activism. He believes that there are three main forms of political activism. The first is revolutionary life as sociality and the secret, millenarian and plotting (French Revolution, Carbonari, Freemasonry, secret associations of various kinds, etc.). The second is that revolutionary life which is not hidden anymore but rather organizes its forms of visibility (unions, revolutionary political parties, soviet revolution). However, only the third form of revolutionary militantism attracts Foucault's interest: revolutionary life as testimony of life, in the form of a style of existence. He writes:

This style of existence specific to revolutionary militantism, and ensuring that one's life bears witness, breaks, and has to break with the conventions, habits, and values of society. And it must manifest directly, by its visible form, its constant practice, and its immediate existence, the concrete possibility and the evident value of another life, which is the true life. (Foucault 2011: 184)

The third aspect of the intersection between forms of life and revolutionary militancy is to be found in Russian nihilism, in European and American anarchism, and in some dramatic fringes of ultra-leftist terrorism of the XX century. As these three political and existential forms of life wear themselves out, a sort of neo-*Kynismus* gains ground. It is a form that denies and surpasses the increasingly evident hierarchic difference between institutionalized revolutionary political projects and revolutionary forms of life, visible and constant. It is a new space with a new trajectory, namely the artistic life. Once again, with radical acumen, Foucault writes:

I think there was a third great medium of Cynicism in European culture, or of the theme of the mode of life as scandal of the truth. We would find it in art. [...] This is the idea that art itself, whether it is literature, painting, or music, must establish a relation to reality which is no longer one of ornamentation, or imitation, but one of laying bare, exposure, stripping, excavation, and violent reduction of existence to its basics. [...] Art (Baudelaire, Flaubert, Manet) is constituted as the site of the irruption of what is underneath, below, of what in a culture has no right, or at least no possibility of expression. To that extent there is an anti-Platonism of modern art. (Foucault 2011: 188)

Irrucent, explosive and trans-historical Art established with its contemporary world a polemic relationship, which would soon be transferred, from the second half of the XIX century to the second half of the XX century, to uncommon forms of will to truth and styles of existence, in new and explosive forms – beyond anti-Platonism and anti-Aristotelianism of the beginning.

### **Nihilism, art and revolution**

The first decades of the XX century saw in the combination of nihilism, art and revolution the explosive outburst of a convulsive collective gesture, which we define as the historic start of the «polyrhythmic splendor»<sup>3</sup>. According to Foucault, the question that marks proto-twentieth-century nihilism coined by Nietzsche<sup>4</sup> and later repeated by Burroughs<sup>5</sup>, paradoxically elevates to “higher truth”, the Great Farewell, the über-truth that

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<sup>3</sup> Obsolete Capitalism’s conference at Roma Tre University (January 2018): *Don’t Believe to the Old Measure* (unpublished).

<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche (2010): 211-212. Nietzsche wrote this last part between 1884 and 1885 but it was published only in 1892 with the other three parts. The theme of “*nothing is true, all is permitted*” is present in Book III, 24th aphorism, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, written and published in 1887, where he confers the sentence to the «invincible order» of the Assassins (CUP 2006: 111).

<sup>5</sup> According to W. Burroughs the rhythmic character saying “*Nothing is true, everything is permitted*” is the legendary figure of Hassan I Sabbah, leader of the heretic sect of the Assassins. The character of the «esoteric terrorist» is present in a continuous rhythmic variation in most of Burroughs works, from *Naked Lunch* on, although Berry Miles, his biographical writer in *Beat Hotel* addresses the

exposes all previous false truths and becomes the parody of the ultimate and definitive truth:

The question of nihilism is not: if God does not exist, everything is permitted<sup>6</sup>. Its formula is rather a question: how to live if I must face up to the fact that ‘nothing is true’?<sup>7</sup> At the heart of Western culture there is the difficulty of defining the link between the concern for the truth and the aesthetics of existence. (Foucault 2011: 190)

Foucault, a kinetic strategist, is not concerned about delineating a doctrine of the cynic philosopher, but rather the history of the arts of existence on an alethurgic and nihilistic plane of immanence. In fact, he claims:

In this West, which has invented many different truths and fashioned so many arts of existence, Cynicism constantly reminds us that very little truth is indispensable for whoever wishes to live truly and that very little life is needed when one truly holds to the truth. (Foucault 2011: 190)

The forms of these «aesthetics of existence», according to Foucault, are self-structuring thanks to bio-tactics created time after time in every historical asperity. But which existential tactical movements should be made, considering the conditions of Modernity, and on which level of composition should these actions be taken? On such concrete strategic

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knowledge of such a mythical figure to Brion Gysin. According to Miles the sentence was taken from a rare and mysterious book of Betty Bouthoul called *Le grand maître des Assassins* edited by Armand Colin in 1936. Foucault on the contrary, never doubts that the nihilist motto comes from Nietzsche (24th aphorism OGM – the legend of the eretic Assassins). Noteworthy is the dub, world and electronic album entitled *Hashasheen – The End of Law* by Bill Laswell and Hakim Bey remarking such esoteric accelerationism. This album, published in 1999 by Sub Rosa, not only focuses on Hassan I Sabbah and the Assassins, but also sees the extraordinary participation of Burroughs as master of ceremony.

<sup>6</sup> A lot has been written on the relationship among the meaning of the famous sentence uttered by Ivan Karamazov in Dostojevskij *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879-80), Nietzsche’s claiming the death of God in his *The Gay Science* and the all-time ancient motto of the heretics saying “*nothing is true, everything is permitted*” that Nietzsche ascribes to the «invincible order» of the Assassins. In this passage we underline how Foucault using the code-word of the Assassins endorses Nietzsche’s idea about the plurimillennarium plot coming from the ancient Greek world of the Alexandrian gnostic hellenism and from the esoteric-heterodox muslim and christian sects. Such philosophical passage precisely describes the neo-gnostic aspect of the rhizospheric plot against the totalization of all powers that we attribute to Klossowski, Deleuze and Foucault.

<sup>7</sup> What is vertiginous in the superior circuit between Nietzsche and Foucault about the way of a *free spiritually* belief, makes clear that the whole aphorism n.24 in the III dissertation of *On the Genealogy of Morality* is a Refrain on the theme of mode of life as an ascetic ideal. In the exact moment in which the God of the ascetic ideal is denied, Foucault and Nietzsche foresee the «new problem» of the value of truth; thus the will of truth needs to experimentally confute the value of truth through «philosophical practices» able to create new styles of existence, new possibilities of life, a different *self-government* and a new *will of power* (cfr. *Chaos Sive Natura*). Hence the inextricable link between culture of truth and aesthetics of existence according to Foucault’s Nietzschean perspective.

setting, according to Deleuze, the «kinetic proposition» of Spinoza's present plane of immanence could be helpful.

According to Deleuze, every plane of immanence with Spinozian features, on which we install ourselves during a-life, determines properly our «mode of living». According to Deleuze, the topic of the mode of living as scandal of truth becomes the topic of the mode of living as scandal of power. It is the power of the artistic-will, or artistic-thought, that generates that ontological plane hosting the manifestation of the wills to power of truth, their ultimate boundary, as art of existence. «What is this plane and how does one construct it?» (Deleuze 1988: 122) asks Deleuze in his 1981 book, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, the book's subtitle, echoes already the mode of living and behaviour, that is, the praxes, not only of cynic philosophers but also of all those who practice a radical pantheism (Chaos = Nature).

While Foucault argues that Kynismus is the «practical philosophy» par excellence of ancient times that stresses the will to truth, according to Deleuze, undoubtedly, Spinoza's *Ethics* represents the key text of practical philosophy conceived as «way of life» on a new and radical ontological plane. Such constructivist existential plane will always be transfinite because the possible composable lives are infinite. Thus, in the «kinetic articulation» of the plane of immanence, the specific forms of various modes of living will delineate themselves in accordance with the ethics of polyrhythmic life, that is, according to the relations of infinite velocities and viscous slownesses determined by their respective states of motion or stillness on the plane.

Life is then a complex rhythmic relationship of differential velocities. This is pure non orientable bio-accelerationism. However, it is not founded on a relationship of subjugation between techno-capital and subject anymore, as the accelerationist philosophical tradition indicates, but rather on the topological and rhythmic dimension of the truth, modes of existence, kinetic energy and a single life's own plane of composition...

### **Rhythm, Chaos and forms of life**

Then, towards the end of the XX century, the unpleasant Rhythm of Chaos presents itself in all the materiality of Event. It is the margin the breaks into the milieu, the courage of immediate and politically equivocal insolence: Diogenes exits, Rotten enters. «I am an antichrist, I am an anarchist, don't know what I want, but I know how to get it, I want to destroy the passersby» (The Sex Pistols 1976).

The call to arms for a restless generation in a random slacking November, happens in 1976 in London, at the hands of a group of street nihilists, the Sex Pistols. They offer another variation on the topic «I am not your kind, I belong eternally to the inferior race»<sup>8</sup> experimented already by Rimbaud, and originally by the cynic multitude that lived in the

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<sup>8</sup> A. Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell*; the lyrics are from *Bad Blood* poem.

Oriental part of the Greek and Roman civilization. However, this time, the *maudit* effect is soon subjected to a viral spatial torsion, and magically establishes a vibratory urban milieu that receives all the flows of chaotic responses and rhythmic counter-strategies animating the milieu – In the City! – of the social space pertaining to the London – earlier, and English, later – metropolitan area.

Additionally, the parrhesiastic and alethurgic effect is explosively amplified when, a few months later, the four *kataskopoi* make a repugnant and shocking caricature of the English national anthem: «God save the Queen, the fascist regime, they made you a moron, a potential H bomb» (the Sex Pistols 1977). They invoked an awakening, and *urbi et orbi* people responded to the provocation in a surprisingly positive manner: numerous people, among the urbanized youth, considered the Sex Pistols up to the challenge they had thrown to the average public, to institutions and society in its broadest meaning. According to the public, the scandal of speaking frankly in such brutal and aggressive terms had reached such level of adherence and authenticity with respect to predicted revolutionary forms of life, that the dramatic, carnivalesque, immoral «false currency» rises on the opposite side as a moment of shocking truth. With a decisive counter-rhythm, the false currency of insulting non-musicians becomes circulating, accepted, shared currency, then imitated by large portions of social, political and artistic youths.

Mark Stewart and his pioneering formation, the Pop Group, were born in this creative and paroxysmal milieu, where non-music and anti-hierarchical generative chaos, the closest and the furthest away, the most irrelevant and the most important, the insolence of truth-telling and the speaking frankly in public spaces, represented a sort of new grammar for a savage practical ethics. Mark Stewart took the challenge to create a new artistic program based on the bios, that is, located inside the structure of a new style of existence transformed in political project. Thus, like Diogenes and Crates, Mark Stewart faces the public denouncing everyone's compromises and forcing each individual to question their way of life (Foucault 2011: 351): «We are all prostitutes, everyone has their price, everyone! And you too will learn to live the lie, and you too will learn to live the lie» (The Pop Group 1979).

### **The principle of irreducibility to categorization, classification and localization**

Mark Stewart and the Pop Group refer to a certain type of expressive practices, which crowd that nameless space where autocracy, conceived as intensive power of the self, traces its own lines of exploration, offer an extensive interpretation. These practices offer an extensive, if not even extreme, interpretation of the principle of irreducibility. This happens through a radical “trans-codification” of sounds and musical schemes that ultimately becomes a style feature. It occurs by tying irreducibility not just to ethical transformations inherent to processes of autonomous subjectivation, and thus to alethurgic

forms recalled above, but also to a new synthesis of Rhythm and Chaos.

In order to tackle the overcoming of knowledge structures – namely, pop culture epistemology, music categories, genres classification, musical expertise, commercial individuation, regularity of productions, mainstream subjectivation, linear periodizations, songs' narrative forms, etc., the Pop Group plans a radical cut of ready-codified milieus through a greater Rhythm, that is, a precise “gesture” of inequality. Otherwise, how could we define the highs and lows, the reprises and the attacks, the gaps and fulls, which continuously follow one another in tracks like *We Are Time* or *Words Disobey Me*, the savage dissonances like escaping missiles on wary and drunk funk loops in *Thief of Fire* and *We Are All Prostitutes*, and the powerful architectures of bass and drum in *Colour Blind* which seem to anticipate and contain the whole Unknown Pleasures of Joy Division?

Moreover, Mark Stewart's texts elaborate an original persisting excess: whispering and shouting, reciting and de-structuring, between virulence and spasms, caresses and harshness, simulations and reversals, squeaks and silences. Words and sentences recited «in the library of a ghost town» (The Pop Group 1980). In order to trans-codify the «rotten code», Mark Stewart and the Pop Group organize a black and savage sumptuousness that infects the most furious and fiendish new resonance of Afro-American songs – funk, jazz, blues and dub – conferring them free tribalism and unprecedented vehement and provocative aggressiveness. This savage ‘cut’ triggers the reflected rejection of previously-traversed territories, highlighting the substantial distance that separates them from Pop Group's artistic proposal, despite their violent proximity. In fact jazz circles reject their noise, funk ones reject their violence, and blues ones their aggressiveness, finally, the dub suffers from their velocity and harshness. Additionally, the punk environment cannot stand their groove and their black matrix, pop condemns their dissonance, the music industry their protest and political intransigence, the music critics their arrogance, the academic world their smirk and frankness, art galleries and museums their theoretical unevenness.

Where can we place, then, the Pop Group? The rejection of grounds, the too-tight mark that connects different territories, justifies, according to Mark Stewart, making the discourse autonomous, that is, creating a new collective expressive space soon to become a matrix-territory for other refugees linked to the freestyle sonic antagonism. Such environment will become an actual *domus* and will later reunite the open collectives made up of seditious sonics with ties to labels like On-U Sound and Y records. Such «architecture of presence» is composed by a complex and ajar multitude of music environments that mingle without being hierarchically organized, thus eliminating the codified obligations of previously-traversed music environments.

It is the difficult relationship between matrix and radix: those who reject the liturgy of the roots raise their receiving antennas. Those who pursue originality need a matrix to receive and then transmit. However, such «open matrix» should in turn avoid to establish itself as a perpetual certified program, whose simple regulated applications can produce

certain results, which means new schemes and old founding practices. These, in turn, should reject in a future vicious circle the production of novelty and free experimentation. A paradoxical situation which the second album, *For How Much Longer Do We Tolerate Mass Murder*, does not back out of.

Published in 1980, it radicalizes even more, compared to the first, the political, musical and artistic discourse, transforming Mark Stewart's group in a savage sonic-warfare-machine. This tremendous war machine is now the producer of an antagonistic and more cohesive milieu, where irreducibility and chaos, the Dionysian and the revolutionary, the political and the existential, vibrate in unison. It is a re-codified space that the Pop Group cohabits with other explosive entities, such as, at the extremities of the spectrum, on the one hand Crass and Discharge, on the other hand the non-punk of Mars and Contortions.

However, the sound-battle of the Pop Group encounters already a first crisis, because it is in transformation, due to its extraordinary environmental impact, from reckless encounter and unforeseeable event – the so-called punk-funk – to codified acoustic space cohabited with the aforementioned «pop epistemologies». In a few years, several artists, including The Birthday Party and Nick Cave would draw from and fully capitalize this new formalized and calculating nature.

### **End of the first nature: the song of the columns and the celestial monument of a melody**

As soon as the profound renewal of the sonic-alethurgic form operated by the Pop Group was finished, Mark Stewart took an additional deforming step, necessary for more profound breakaway from the territories of the reproductive measure. He exits the labyrinth of the «first nature» of sound thanks to an absolute movement that marks his arrival to the «second nature» of sound, that is, a disturbing technological space where sounds can arise from anywhere.

We are talking here about the *tèchne* of the dub conceived as matrix, or Chaos-matrix, as operational knowledge, and not as Code-Territory contiguous to reggae. Like any experimenter dominated by the «artistic will», «the highest dimension of the will to power» according to Nietzsche and Deleuze, (Deleuze 1995: 118) Mark Stewart is conscious of the remarkable potentials that the polyrhythmic splendor of the Chaos-matrix hide within its practices. After all, the signature that the Pop Group leaves on their territorial component is coextensive to the traditional scheme of their line-up and of their actual “being group”, both archetypes of the pop.

On the other hand, the structure of the songs elaborated by the Pop Group, whose de/construction was entrusted for their debut album to the dub master Dennis Bovell, appears to be functional to the types of actions and milieu components pertaining to the territory that Mark Stewart tries to question. The revolutionary practice of Jamaican dub,



mediated by particular techniques deployed in the recording studios, targets the architecture of the songs, the properties of sounds and their articulation.

Moreover, as Mark Stewart himself observes, it is impossible to separate the demolition of orthodoxy in the hierarchy of sounds from its intrinsic political value, which is surprisingly similar to a certain extent to social practices aimed at de-structuring any kind of «orthodoxy» in any level of the discourse. Hyper-fiction and hyper-reality, which mark the two poles of the new democracy of dub sounds (Davis 2018) also mark the end of acoustic representation of the elements of composition, the «first nature» mentioned above. This passage from an orderly world of sounds to a chaotic space, which originates Milieus and Rhythms, is what Nietzsche and Derrida (Derrida 2018), in a different context, following Paul Valéry, define as the end of the Socratic «song of the columns» and the «celestial monument of a melody», as well as the start of new music modes expressing complication oriented towards a «labyrinthic model»:

In the same way, how simple were the Greeks in the idea which they formed of themselves! How far we surpass them in the knowledge of man! Again, how full of labyrinths would our souls appear in comparison with theirs! If we had to venture upon an architecture after the style of our own souls – we are too cowardly for that! – a labyrinth would have to be our model. That music which is peculiar to us, and which really expresses us, lets this be clearly seen! (for in music men let themselves go, because they think there is no one who can see them hiding behind their music). (Nietzsche 1911: 149)

### **Beginning of the second nature: the divorce from territories and artificial planarization of spaces**

Hence, Mark Stewart's Dub-Chaos starts its reign by putting itself forward as new spatial art under the label of labyrinthic ecstasy. It is a molecular way of treating acoustic substances, which significantly shifts the forms of music itself away from its original territory: it is an act of divorce from locations. The stress has now shifted on the engineering production and studio post-production. Mark Stewart's dub noise overturns the primal nature of sound – the form of music as «a gathering of the forces of the earth taking all the parts up» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 340) – discovering vice versa a second nature – the form of sound as «moving matter of a continuous variation». (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 340)

In all forms of dub, this happens due to the subversion of the regime of division of labour within the recording studio. Thus, the sound engineer and the recording technician become autonomous from the administrative positions which they were previously forced to take by the hierarchization of roles. So, they rise to the creative position of 'artist'

and artificial musician, that is, virtual non-musician. Technical operators and the machines they operate become a single virtual machinic brain in which an exchange of positions takes place: earthly sound forces distribute themselves across the sonic-cybernetic forces of chaos, and the result of such dissemination is that the producer becomes an artist and the artist an engineer. The dub producer is then a new form of machinic artist, although the ghost of the non-musician persists in him. A ghost which is evidently different in its nature from the punk non-musician, although in some circumstances the two things can coincide.

Here, our mind goes to Mark Stewart's involvement with the urban dub master Adrian Sherwood, he himself suspended between these two worlds, in the distorted limbus of *Learning to Cope With Cowardice*. Both forces of chaos, the Jamaican one and the London one, quote the discourse of «competence» and its statute. As if the stereotypes of creativity and experimentation, with respect to the non-music of *Learning to Cope*, found limits to their overcoming somehow due to «competence» and its excess. Such specific situation pertaining to *Learning to Cope* seems to hint at a code-threshold beyond which a certain degree of artistic-style incompetence is necessary to overcome codified spaces and reach thus the Great Rhythm of Inequality, novelty as a breakup.

This same process of autonomous subjectivation, which leads to the creation of new modes of life, is inborn to a certain kind of productive non-knowledge. This production of subjectivity, in fact, arrives only at the "right moment", when knowledge milieus (i.e. the musician with the greatest technical ability) and power milieus (i.e. the musician with the best popularity) are behind the artistic-will and artistic-thought. Thus, the autonomous subjectivation of *Learning to Cope*, like the one of the other albums that we have previously mentioned, presents itself in its most dangerous and savage line when it enters the area of life-art experimentation that Deleuze calls operating artistically (Deleuze 1995: 98). This means that autonomous subjectivation itself is an artistic-activity that, according to Deleuze, «distinct from, and lying outside, knowledge and power» (Deleuze 1995: 114). Hence, the non-musician's autonomous subjectivity and the becoming-form of the Chaos-Opera stand on a different plane from knowledge and power. They create their own operative milieu, which is made possible only thanks to the displayed incompetence of non-knowledge (the overcoming of the relationship between forms) and the non-power (the overcoming of the relationship between forces) previously recalled. It seems as if the reductive functions, identified by Foucault while exploring Cynic philosophical thought, were to be active every time the line of creative destruction is crossed and the area of artistic operation is entered: art as life style, and life as art of existence.

### **Conclusion: Nature-Chaos as sound. The Chaos-Opera is born**

In the interval between *How Much Longer* (The Pop Group 1980) and *Learning to Cope*

(Mark Stewart & the Maffia 1983), Mark Stewart has certainly wondered which choices and which actions should be made when moving in a musical space where the various steps of creative destruction and labyrinthic ecstasies of the contemporary artist converge. The sonic options that he isolated in collaboration with Adrian Sherwood seem to answer to the questions that flutter in every corner of our artistic contemporaneity – Which hierarchical de-structuring should be made in each line of discourse? What is the mixture of forces necessary to create a new form of chaos opera? Mark Stewart certainly believed that the recent technological revolution and the subsequent phase of control an annihilation of resistances, operated by dominant forces in this developmental crisis of our society, would provide him with the grey context from which he could extricate a new relationship between forces through the music-form. Mark Stewart's milieu is thus open to a new metamorphosis of sounds mediated by that technology that allowed him to overcome in terms of intensity the already codified space of the Pop Group. This is the composition plane that generates the noise-dub device of the Maffia, which will accompany Mark Stewart in his debut-masterpiece *Learning to Cope With Cowardice*. And as it was for Foucault, the Great Rhythm of this Chaos-Opera will be the «possession/obsession of the double», the alterity that can be found in the rough studio, «a repetition, another layer, the return of the same, a catching on something else, an imperceptible difference, a coming apart and ineluctable tearing open» (Deleuze 1995: 84). The technological and experimental dub of *Learning to Cope*, like a lethal virus and definitive distortion of Sound-Reality, or, in other words, Nature-Chaos as sound.

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