A Political Philosophy of Anger

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Abstract

This dissertation deals with the political uses of anger, focusing on those cases in which anger is mobilized against socially structural forms of injustice (henceforth, "radical anger"). The author provides a philosophical defence of the legitimacy and usefulness of this kind of anger, together with a set of conceptual tools for distinguishing among different instances of anger in the political realm. The text consists of seven chapters, an introduction and a short conclusion. The first chapter offers a genealogy of the pathologization of radical anger, investigating the linguistic and conceptual entanglement of *rage* and *rabies*. The following chapter reviews a few cases in which oppressed groups successfully reclaimed radical anger in spite of widespread pathologizing and criminalizing tendencies, drawing mainly from the radical feminist and antiracist traditions. Special attention is also paid to the relationship between anger and violence, as well as to the opportunity for structurally discriminated groups to politically embrace anger. The metaphor of a *ballistics of anger* is introduced to heuristically distinguish among specific occurrences of political anger. The third chapter outlines the essential features of a political philosophy of radical anger, starting from a re-reading of Michel Foucault's interpretation of ancient Cynicism which emphasises the angry character of the latter. After asking whether radical anger can be considered philosophically true and reactionary anger defined as untrue, three possible arguments in favour of an affirmative answer are considered. Since the first two arguments, based respectively on the works of Rahel Jaeggi and Giorgio Agamben, prove unsuccessful, a third alternative, relying mainly on the works of Foucault and Hannah Arendt, is proposed by the author. Chapters from 4 to 6 look for contemporary reprises of Cynical anger, proposing a philosophical reading of the lives and works of three figures who angrily confronted several kinds of structural injustice: Valerie Solanas, Malcolm X and Audre Lorde. The dissertation shows that each of them can offer useful additions to the political philosophy of radical anger already sketched. In particular, Solanas can help

thinking the connections between anger, negation, utopia and abolition; X testifies to the importance of the link between radical anger and the notion of care of the self (*ἐπιμέλεια ἑαυτοῦ*); Lorde allows us to understand the deep implications of the *use* of radical anger and paves the way for an *erotic* conception of this feeling. Finally, Chapter 7 presents the international trans-feminist movement Ni Una Menos-Non Una di Meno as an example of the practical and theoretical strengths of radical anger.

To Anita Rambaldini, who taught me what love is

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Introduction

Siding with the Flower Pots

Moving from right to wrong. How many times have we heard of it? One may start out with legitimate reasons for dissatisfaction, even protest, but then quickly come to be seen more reprehensible than those one wished to criticise. Usually, the "move" in question refers to the ways in which one's reasons are put forward. The thought goes: if one is convinced to be on the right side, why would she shout or use strong words? It would make her run the risk of not getting what she wants. Once examined carefully, however, this seemingly common-sense reasoning looks far from convincing.

There was much consternation in Florence, on March 5th, 2018. Members of the local Senegalese community had marched in an unauthorised demonstration between the city hall and the train station, damaging six flower pots that were part of the street furniture. The city's mayor, Dario Nardella, spoke of "unacceptable violence" and of the need to bring the perpetrators to justice[1]. It was the mayor whom the Senegalese demonstrators wanted to meet, after peacefully walking to the town hall. Nardella's protracted unavailability was then followed by the widely condemned events mentioned above. The Senegalese had plenty of reasons to protest: that morning a 65-year-old Italian white man, Roberto Pirrone, had shot dead a Black compatriot of theirs, the street-vendor Idy Diene, in the city centre. Diene's cousin, Samb Modou, had also been killed in Florence in 2011 along with another man from Senegal, Diop Mor, by a far-right activist, Gianluca Casseri. On February 3rd 2018, just over a month before Diene's homicide, a former political candidate of the far-right Lega party[2], Luca Traini, had crossed the

[1] "Dario Nardella ha condannato la protesta della comunità senegalese a Firenze", in *il Post*, 6/3/2018.

[2] On Lega's shift toward the extreme right see Gianluca Passarelli and Dario Tuorto, *La Lega di Salvini. Estrema destra di governo*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2018.

streets of Macerata purposely shooting (and injuring) six Black people. Increasingly brutal racist attacks were taking place all around Italy[3].

And yet - many said - what fault was it of the flower pots? Nardella, generically speaking out against "violent people, of whatever origin", compared the breaking of a pot to murder: once you move from right to wrong – this seemed to be the underlying logic – you are as wrong as you can be. Couldn't the demonstrators have expressed their grief with a quiet procession, or with a (composed and preferably Christian) prayer vigil?

We have become accustomed to reasonings like these, hardly noticing their manifest absurdity. How can one even think of an anti-racist protest being equated with murder? In the midst of a growing climate of racial hatred, when Black people had strong reasons to fear for their safety, what was so shocking about the damage to a few flower pots, triggered by the mayor's lack of readiness to hear the legitimate concerns of a part of his constituents? Even a modest display of anger by the Senegalese community produced a scandal. Such outraged reactions had been increasingly legitimised in the Italian public sphere, becoming almost an everyday occurrence. After the terrorist attack in Macerata Matteo Salvini, the leader of the party for which the attacker had recently run in local elections, told the press that the "moral responsibility" for the shooter's actions was to be attributed to "those who have filled Italy with illegal immigrants"[4] - not exactly an invitation to tone it down.

Clearly enough, not all kinds of anger were treated equally: Salvini's, whether one liked it or not, was an expected sort of anger, part of the order of things. The anger of the Senegalese in Florence, on the other hand, seemed obscene and difficult to understand precisely because it was unexpected – both for the leader of the Lega and for Nardella, who was a political opponent of the former. Whether one felt cautious sympathy for them or prejudicial hostility, immigrants were supposed to play the role of passive and silent victims, as the targets of a racist crime or of media-constructed hate campaigns.

[3] Lorenzo Tondo, Laura Giuffrida, "Warning of 'dangerous acceleration' in attacks on immigrants in Italy", in *The Guardian*, 3/8/2018.

[4] Silvia Morosi, "Sparatoria Macerata, Salvini: 'colpa di chi ci ha riempito di terroristi'", in *Il Corriere della sera*, 3/2/2018.

However, in as much as the victim "is such because she is first and foremost forced to remain silent"[5], at best settling for some self-styled spokesman, her anger constitutes an unpredicted statement, the sign of a properly political subjectivity. The demonstration in Florence was therefore not a generic attack on the street furniture, but the vindication of the value of Black lives beyond the unresponsiveness of those who held public office. The point the protesters made clear was not merely about their status as victims of particular crimes, but also about social injustice. Experiencing injustice is certainly not a condition one chooses voluntarily, but it is often represented ideologically as such: the wronged person will have to prove herself worthy enough to receive help against the effects of her own oppression[6]. We have come to expect compliance with what Wolf Bukowski calls *the etiquette of oppression*, which in the Italian context reaches its maximum visibility in the narrative of *urban decorum*[7]: people are willing, for instance,

[5] Daniele Giglioli, *Critica della vittima. Un esperimento con l'etica*, nottetempo, Rome 2014, pp. 17-18.

[6] Iris Marion Young defined "oppression" as one of the manifestations of structural injustice: "Oppression consists in systematic institutional processes which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings, or institutionalized social processes which inhibit people's ability to play and communicate with others or to express their feelings and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen" (*Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1990, p. 38); "A structural account offers a way to understanding inequality of opportunity, oppression and domination, that does not seek individualized perpetrators, but rather considers most actors complicit in its production" ("Lived Body vs Gender: Reflections on Social Structure and Subjectivity", in *Ratio (new series)* XV 4, 2002, p. 421). In this dissertation, however, I'm using this term in a more general sense, to point out the strongly asymmetrical exercise of power of one group upon another that usually comes together with structural injustice.

[7] Within Italian sociology and urban studies, the notion of urban decorum (*decoro urbano*) has accomplished a theoretical and political relevance it lacks elsewhere (in English, for instance, the closest notion would be "decency", which nonetheless can acquire positive overtones – e.g. "a decent person" – that the Italian *decenza* cannot convey). According to Tamar Pitch, who was the first scholar to systematically analyse decorum in the Italian context, "*Decoro* is a term used to mean different things. A behaviour is 'decorous' when it is appropriate to the type of person and the context in which it takes place; a house is decorous when it is (fairly) clean and tidy, perhaps in spite of the social position of the person living in it. And here we can already see that this adjective is usually used for people and places that are in the lower-middle levels of society. Who would think of calling a rich person's home decorous? [...] Decorous is someone who stays within limits, and limits must at least seem, if not be, self-imposed. Boundaries change according to many variables (gender, age, social position, for example), therefore an analysis of boundaries can say a lot about processes of social control. But the fact remains that in the prevailing common sense the noun 'decorum' [*decoro*] and the adjective 'decorous' [*decoroso*] do not apply to all social positions. As if to say that the rich and powerful do not need to impose limits on themselves and do not have to be 'decorous'" (Tamar Pitch, *Contro il decoro. L'uso politico della pubblica decenza*, Laterza, Rome 2013, pp. 8-9). For studies focused exclusively on the urban dimension of decorum see Carmen Pisanello, *In nome del decoro. Dispositivi estetici e politiche securitarie*, ombre corte, Verona 2017 and Pier Paolo Ascari, *Corpi e recinti. Estetica ed economia politica del decoro*, ombre corte, Verona 2019.

to "tolerate" the presence of the homeless in their cities only on condition that they do not sleep in parks or beg in central areas[8].

For the majority of the Italian public, censoring the expression of Black anger had nothing to do with racism. During the same months of 2018, there was widespread solidarity with the concurrent anti-racist demonstrations against the Trump presidency in the United States[9]. While African-American activists defiantly shouted that "Black Lives Matter", in Florence – the anthropologist Zoe Vicentini caustically noted – the slogan was rather "Flower Pots' Lives Matter"[10].

Harsh defensiveness in the face of anger "from below" was indeed not an occasional occurrence, but could also be observed in situations where the cause of anger and its target fully coincided. Less than one year later, on the occasion of the International Women's Day, activists from the transnational feminist movement Non Una di Meno (Not One Less, henceforth NUdM) threw pink paint on the statue of the popular Italian journalist Indro Montanelli (1909-2001), in Milan. A few months earlier, in a widely circulated articled titled "It's Time to Remove Montanelli's Statue", the writer Jennifer Guerra had brought back into the limelight some uncomfortable details in Montanelli's biography, including his participation in the colonial war against Eritrea and Ethiopia (1935-1936) and the "purchase", during that conflict, of a slave - a "child bride" with whom Montanelli affirmed several times (most recently in a February 2000 piece[11]) he had had sexual intercourse[12]. While he had never shown any regret for his despicable past, all the major Italian newspapers strongly condemned the activists' behaviour, which was stigmatised as "vandalism". Influential progressive commentators accused

[8] Wolf Bukowski, *La buona educazione degli oppressi. Piccola storia del decoro*, Alegre, Rome 2019.

[9] This tendency to downplay internal racism while stigmatizing it elsewhere has been observed in more recent cases, too – see Angelica Pesarini, "Questioni di privilegio. L'Italia e i suoi George Floyd", in *il lavoro culturale*, 6/6/2020.

[10] Zoe Vicentini, "Fioriere Lives Matter", in *Dinamo Press*, 6/3/2018.

[11] Indro Montanelli, "Quando andai a nozze con Destà", in *Il Corriere della sera*, 12/2/2000.

[12] Jennifer Guerra, "È tempo di rimuovere la statua dedicata a Montanelli", in *The Vision*, 28/6/2018. On Montanelli's adhesion to fascism and colonial expansionism, as well as his following attempts to minimize his actions at the time and downplay the violence of Italian colonialism, see Marco Lenci, "L'Eritrea e l'Etiopia nell'esperienza di Indro Montanelli", in "Studi piacentini" 33, 2003, pp. 205-231 and Renata Broggini, *Passaggio in Svizzera. L'anno nascosto di Indro Montanelli*, Feltrinelli, Milan 2007. On Non Una di Meno's action on March 8th, 2019, see Igiaba Scego, "Not One Less", in *World Literature Today* 93(4), 2019, pp. 48-52.

NUdM of attacking one of the "fathers" of Italian journalism, unfairly criticizing "a man of his times"[13] who was no longer able to defend himself against their slanders[14]. What got lost in the heated debate that followed was the political sophistication of the activists' gesture. Challenging the sexist stereotype of the angry and grim feminist later embraced by the press, their protest combined anger and joy: the throwing of pink paint on the monument of a self-declared buyer of sexual slaves manifested all their rage against what the idealisation of such a figure represented, but it also maintained a light-hearted, playful dimension. The statue was *not* damaged (the removable paint quickly washed off by the authorities), but parodied, changed in symbolism: from celebration to mockery. The easily reversible nature of the performance, however, was not at all conciliatory: pink paint can be removed without much effort, but it can just as quickly be applied again – as indeed happened in 2020, when local students threw it once more against the monument, that time on the occasion of an anti-racist demonstration[15].

Whose Anger?

I decided to begin this dissertation by mentioning two recent episodes that happened in my home country because they show the peculiar and underrepresented kind of anger whose political meaning and potentialities I intend to deal with in my research.

In recent years, anger has been at the centre of political analyses both popular and academic. A few days after the British electorate decided to leave the European Union in June 2016, an editorial in *The Economist* claimed that anger had secured that result: "Anger stirred up a winning turnout in the depressed, down-at-heel cities of England. Anger at immigration, globalisation, social liberalism and even feminism […] translated

[13] On the weakness of such invocations to "contextualize" Montanelli's infamous deeds, see the reflections of historian Valeria Deplano ("A proposito delle statue e dell'urgenza di decolonizzare l'Europa", in *Zapruder*, 13/6/2020).

[14] For a thorough analysis of this polemic, see Carla Panico, "The re/production of a (white) people: confronting Italian nationalist populism as a gender and race issue", in *European Journal of English Studies* 25(2), 2021, pp. 144-147.

[15] "La statua di Indro Montanelli a Milano è stata nuovamente imbrattata", in *il Post*, 14/6/2020.

into a vote to reject the EU"[16]. In a few months' time Donald Trump, a populist far-right billionaire who had gladly "accepted the mantle of anger"[17], was elected as president of the United States. These two largely unexpected outcomes – at times associated with the growing political weight of the far right in Europe and the ascent to power of populist, right-wing governments in countries such as Brazil and India – have constituted the focus of countless studies on the relationship between anger and politics that have appeared since then. While some surveys found that expressing anger at the current political situation is a frequent trait in far-right voters[18], the reference to anger has usually been both more wide-ranging and more tentative within this vast literature. Thus, essayist Pankaj Mishra claimed in an influential book that ours is an "age of anger" analogous to the one supposedly taking place in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while rarely mentioning anger at all in his voluminous text – he rather preferred to apply a quite specific, Nietzschean notion of *ressentiment* to phenomena ranging from Russian Bolshevism to Italian fascism, from Twitter 'shitstorms' to ISIS[19]. Similarly, while Arlie Russell Hochschild's remarkable ethnography of Tea Party supporters in Louisiana bears "Anger and Mourning on the American Right" as a subtitle, her study never attempts to demonstrate that for those people such feelings were more significant than others like hate, lack of trust, hopelessness, or envy[20].

[16] "The Politics of Anger", in *The Economist*, 2/7/2016.

[17] Michelle Hackman, "Donald Trump: *I will gladly accept the mantle of anger*", in *Vox*, 14/1/2016.

[18] E.g. Pavlos Vasilopuolos, George E. Marcus, Nicholas A. Valentino, Martial Foucault, "Fear, Anger, and Voting for the Far Right: Evidence From the November 13, 2015 Paris Terror Attacks", in *Political Psychology* 40(4), 2019, pp. 679-704; Thomas Rudolph, "Populist anger, Donald Trump, and the 2016 election", in *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 31(1), 2021, pp. 33-58.

[19] Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger. A History of the Present*, Picador, New York 2018. A good example of Mishra's taste for over-generalization can be found on p. 30: "After all, Maxim Gorky, the Bolshevik, Muhammad Iqbal, the poet-advocate of 'pure' Islam, Martin Buber, the exponent of the 'New Jew', and Lu Xun, the campaigner for a 'New Life' in China, as well as [Italian proto-fascist poet] D'Annunzio, were all devotees of Nietzsche. Asian anti-imperialists and American robber barons borrowed equally eagerly from the nineteenth-century polymath Herbert Spencer, the first truly global thinker – who, after reading Darwin, coined the term 'survival of the fittest'. Hitler revered Atatürk (literally, 'the father of the Turks') as his guru; Lenin and Gramsci were keen on Taylorism, or 'Americanism'; American New Dealers later adapted Mussolini's 'corporatism'".

[20] Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land. Anger and Mourning of the American Right*, The Free Press, New York 2018, 2nd edition.

This is not to say that the current emphasis on right-wing anger is completely misguided, but to suggest that it may be part of a wider problematic. As the historian of emotions Thomas Dixon recently wrote:

> The available evidence does not suggest that we live in an age of anger, if by that we mean that people are reporting feeling more 'anger' than they used to, either relative to other emotion words, or in an absolute sense. However, we do live in an age of anger in another sense: political discourse, including written and broadcast journalism, and commentary on social media, is fascinated and preoccupied with 'anger'[21].

The preoccupation noted by Dixon is also reflected in the paradoxical status that the anger expressed by left-wing parties and politicians assumes within such a "political discourse". At times, it is presented as an equally blameworthy (though perhaps less successful) feeling, which contributes to the emergence of political polarization and sectarianism as much as its far-right equivalent[22]. In a few other instances, leftist politicians and intellectuals are criticized for their purported inability to take popular anger seriously and to direct it on a different path than the one opened by the populist right[23]. Most of the times, however, the politicization of anger is described as something that the left endures more or less passively in the face of its opponents' radicalization: "the split has widened because the right has moved right, not because the left has moved left"[24]. Beliefs of this kind have gone hand in hand, in many journalistic and academic quarters, with growing perplexities about whether the average voter meets the minimum requirements in terms of rationality and education to meaningfully participate in democratic life[25]. Within this framework, popular displays of "negative" feelings like

[21] Thomas Dixon, "What is the History of Anger a History of?", in *Emotions: History, Culture, Society* 4, 2020, pp. 6-7.
[22] Cf. Bret Stephens, "Bernie's Angry Bros", in *The New York Times*, 31/1/2020; Ezra Klein, *Why We Are Polarized*, Simon & Schuster, New York 2020, esp. chap. 3.
[23] Cf. Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2016, pp. 15-19.
[24] Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, p. 7.
[25] Hochschild calls "the great paradox" the fact that in the US many white working-class and middle-class voters support politicians whose agendas are apparently at odds with all their material interests (*Strangers in Their Own Land*, pp. 8-16).

anger are usually associated with a supposed decline in the influence of rational argumentation and scientific evidence in political life and a one-directional turn towards reactionary demagoguery. The introduction of the notion of *post-truth* (Oxford Dictionary's "word of the year" in 2016) was another sign in this direction, since it refers to "circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief"[26] – as if facts never interacted with feelings and values.

However, as Lorna Finlayson has shown, post-truth is a largely polemical category, useful to slur its referents more than to understand their behaviour[27] – and growing empirical evidence suggests that voters are less gullible than some commentators think[28]. In the related hurry to denounce the mobilization of strong passions in the public sphere, many analysts have ruled out the possibility that anger may also play a different and even democratically emancipatory role on the political scene[29].

The episodes mentioned at the beginning of this Introduction show us something different: not the anger "from above" through which right-wing populists try to gain popular support when scapegoating some minority, but an anger "from below", embraced by a group of people who claim to have experienced a form of injustice. Moreover, those episodes point in a direction that, though ideologically opposite to far-right populism, does not coincide with a mere left-wing (in)version of the former, as it lacks the populist element and does not operate at the level of party politics, but at that of grassroots activists and social movements[30].

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[26] https://www.lexico.com/definition/post-truth (last accessed on 10/4/2022). Several scholars have claimed that ours is a post-truth age. See, among others: Maurizio Ferraris, *Postverità e altri enigmi*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2017; Lee McIntyre, *Post-Truth*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2018; Silvio Waisbord, "Truth Is What Happens to News. On journalism, fake news, and post-truth", in *Journalism Studies* 19(13), 2018, pp. 1866-1878.

[27] Lorna Finlayson, "What To Do With Post-Truth", in *Nordic Wittgenstein Review* Special Issue, 2019, pp. 63-79.

[28] Hugo Mercier, *Not Born Yesterday: The Science of Who We Trust and What We Believe*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2020.

[29] Cf. William Davies, "Anger fast and slow: mediations of justice", in *Global Discourse* 10(2), 2020, pp. 181-182.

[30] It therefore avoids both the objections moved against populist politics in general and those leveled at left-wing populism in particular.

Two further observations can be made starting from my Italian vignettes. First of all, they demonstrate how easily the normalization of far-right anger can coexist, even among liberal sectors of public opinion, with a widespread hostility against a more egalitarian employment of the same feeling – a phenomenon that in Italy may be especially evident for contextual reasons, but that it is common also in other liberal-democratic countries[31]. Secondly, they remind us that the language of injustice and oppression can be used not only by people recurring to anger "from below", but also by angry populists (think of Salvini blaming immigration policies for racist crimes) and by those who think anger should have no place within democratic politics (Nardella's condemnation of the Senegalese community and the media representations of a former sexual-slave-owner as unfairly criticized by feminists after his death). This last remark raises an important issue, namely how to distinguish different kinds of political anger at the normative level. Clearly enough, right-wing anger usually relies on the presence of a charismatic leader more than the anger embodied by left-wing feminist activists, but differences of this sort are largely tactical: they don't tell us much about the different political values, ideas and worldviews at stake. It would be useful, in this connection, to consider the various notions of "justice" invoked when political anger is released. I propose to do so by referring to the concept of *structural injustice* as conceived by Iris Marion Young.

Young's account rests on three main ideas, the first being that of a *social structure*, which refers "to the relation of basic social positions that fundamentally condition the opportunity and life prospects of the persons located in those positions". The conditioning occurs because, within a social structure, positions are interconnected with one another[32]. Social class provides a good example here: if A is born into the entrepreneurial class and B into the lower working class, A will have access to an

[31] For example, see Whitney Phillips, "Whose Anger Counts?", in *Boston Review* XIII, 2020, pp. 132-147 on the United States.

[32] Iris Marion Young, "Equality of Whom? Social Groups and Judgments of Injustice", in *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 9(1), 2001, p. 14.

expensive private education which B won't be able to afford; in turn, getting such an education will give A social, economic and cultural opportunities that B, other things being equal, will lack. We have to keep in mind, however, that a category such as class is a tool for theorizing structures more than individuals: over time, one can move from a class to another, or live at the threshold between different classes. What matters is that at any time individuals find themselves grouped in the social space in a way that depends on class and other social structures[33].

Young's second idea is *structural inequality*, consisting "in the relative constraints some people encounter in their freedom and material well-being as the cumulative effect of the possibilities of their social positions, as compared with others who in their social positions have more options or easier access to benefits"[34]. Think here of the huge power asymmetry existing in 1936 Ethiopia between the young colonizer Montanelli (white, male, middle-class, armed) and his child-bride Destà (allegedly fourteen, Black, female, poor, unarmed). It should be noted that the constraints imposed by structural inequality are not impossible to overcome – sometimes the colonized can and do rebel against the colonizers -, but nonetheless impose significant burdens on those who are disadvantaged by them.

The last key idea is that of *structural injustice* itself, which Young saw as the outcome of a further evaluation of instances of *structural inequality*: if the latter give rise to *patterns* "of average difference in level of status or well-being along several parameters" and we can tell a plausible story explaining the production of those patterns, then a *judgment* of structural injustice can be made. The judgment itself does not require the adoption of a specific moral theory, but only that of a "broad principle of equal opportunity: that it is unfair to some individuals to have an easy time flourishing and realizing their goals, while others are hampered in doing so, due to circumstances

[33] Cf. Young, "Lived Body vs Gender", p. 422. Notice that, on Young's view, "structural inequalities associated with class are just as much cultural […] as are those of race, gender, and disability" (Iris Marion Young, "Structural Injustice and the Politics of Difference", in Thomas Christiano and John Christman, *Contemporary Debates in Political Philosophy*, Blackwell, Malden 2009, p. 374).

[34] Young, "Equality of Whom?", p. 15.

beyond their control"[35]. A form of structural inequality to which a judgment of injustice certainly applies is racial inequality, which the Senegalese inhabitants of Florence angrily protested. As Black immigrants in Italy, they experienced many instances of structural injustice, ranging from discriminatory laws and policies to difficulties in accessing basic public services[36]. The racist killing of Idy Diene only reminded them that even while walking in plain daylight Black people are subject to dangers and constraints that white people don't have to endure[37]. On the other hand, Salvini's claim, according to which racist violence is caused by purportedly permissive immigration policies, does not refer to any observable kind of structural injustice. According to the exact way in which we want to understand it, it is either false (historically, racism does not originate in the 'invasion', by non-whites, of territories inhabited by white people – it is rather the other way round)[38] or irrelevant (as the presence of violent racists in a given country is a plausible reason for preventing them from committing crimes, not a reason to expel Black residents).

Once Young's framework is introduced, we can see that it is anger at structural injustices (that I will henceforth call *radical anger*), and not political anger in general, that nowadays seems to be especially difficult to understand and that rarely gets serious scholarly or journalistic attention. The present dissertation tries to fill that gap, paying special attention to some dimensions of radical anger.

Contents Overview

In chapter 1, I will look into the pathologizing rhetoric often mobilized against radical anger, inquiring about its genealogy and implications. My starting point will be the fact that in several European languages (French, Italian, Spanish) the same word defines

[35] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[36] Clelia Bartoli, *Razzisti per legge. L'Italia che discrimina*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 2012, esp. pp. 14-27.

[37] On the relationship between race and public space see, among others: Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1997, pp.41-52.

[38] E.g. Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History. Elementary Structures of Race*, Verso, London-New York 2016.

both the most emphatic occurrences of anger (i.e. *rage*) and one of the deadliest viruses ever discovered (i.e. *rabies*). Looking behind this etymological peculiarity, the chapter will offer a tentative cultural history of the anger-rabies nexus, reviewing a wide range of sources (from Homer to Hobbes, from nineteenth century 'crowd psychology' to twentieth century psychiatry). Even in our scientifically enlightened age, I will argue, the link between contagious illness and angry crowds hasn't completely vanished – as an analysis of the 2011 English riots can reveal.

Chapter 2 will show that, in spite of widespread pathologizing tendencies, some oppressed groups have managed to successfully reclaim their anger on the political scene (my examples coming from radical feminism, militant antiracism and anticolonialism). Then, a closer examination of radical anger will follow, focusing especially on its complex relationship with violence and offering counter-arguments to several objections according to which anger would not serve well the aims of those who experience structural injustice. I will finally introduce the metaphor of a *ballistics of anger* as a heuristic tool to better distinguish between radical and reactionary uses of anger (What is a certain instance of anger pointed at? Who is getting angry at whom? What chances does anger have to hit its target? Is a given eruption of anger proportional to the underlying injustice? Etc.).

While the ballistics of anger provides us with a few useful rules of thumb, making the case for as many people as possible to join anger at structural injustices requires a *political philosophy of anger*, which will be the subject of chapter 3. There, following in the steps of Pierre Hadot's work on ancient thought, I will take philosophy to be a consistent combination of a *discourse* and a *life choice*. A key reference for the political philosophy of anger will then be found in the Ancient Cynics, those "barking philosophers" whom Michel Foucault chose in his later lectures as an example of the relationship between truth and life. Re-reading and expanding the Cynics' legacy, I will explain why radical anger can be considered philosophically 'true' and, on the other hand, reactionary anger deemed as philosophically 'false'.

The philosophical anger embodied by the Cynics, however, is not immediately reproducible in contemporary societies. Chapters 4 to 6 will consequently deal with the need to find models of Cynical anger for our times, bringing to light the political and philosophical potential of the lives and works of three public figures often criticized for a purported excess of rage: Valerie Solanas, the feminist who wrote a manifesto for the abolition of men; Malcolm X, "the angriest Negro [sic] in America"; and Audre Lorde, whose fierce reappropriation of "the uses of anger" sparked long-lasting controversies in many intellectual and political quarters. Each of them, I will claim, can teach us important lessons for an effective recourse to radical anger. At the same time, they will allow us to better our understanding of concepts that are essential to build a political philosophy of anger: negation, utopia and "abolition" (Solanas); "care of the self" (Malcolm X); "the erotic" and "use" (Lorde).

Chapter 7 will be devoted to an international social movement that in recent years has put anger to work in politically impressive ways: the trans-feminist movement Ni Una Menos - Non Una di Meno, whose Argentinian and Italian chapters will be given special attention. My goal won't be so much to find in the initiatives of such a movement the demonstration of the previously formulated philosophy of anger, but rather to look at its mobilizations as providing fundamental resources to make such a philosophy stronger, pointing to the theoretical potential of radical praxis. In this connection, I will also make a close comparison between Ni Una Menos' *feminist strike* and the *general strike* theorised by Walter Benjamin.

Lastly, the Conclusion will summarize the overall trajectory of the dissertation and consider the role of radical anger in the face of the looming environmental catastrophe.

A Methodological Note

Research on politically charged emotions, especially from a qualitative perspective, raises many methodological issues and complications. In this section I will briefly

consider the main ones and provide some reflections on my ways to tackle them in what follows.

The first problem is of terminological nature: as Dixon has convincingly demonstrated, the word "emotion" as a catch-all term referring to older and heterogeneous notions like "passions", "sentiments", "affections" and "appetites" is a quite recent invention, dating back to nineteenth-century psychology[39]. Therefore, speaking of – say – the French Revolution or of Plato's theory of the soul in the language of "emotions" would be to some extent misleading. Things get even more complicated in the case of anger, for several reasons. To begin with, anger – as Barbara Rosenwein puts it – "is no one thing":

> The anger that is part of hatred (as Buddha theorized) is not the same as the anger mingled with pleasure and pain (as Aristotle thought of it), nor are those angers identical to the mournful rage of the far-right Louisianans that Hochschild interviewed. All of these angers co-exist in our society today, even though we tend to mash them together in our minds in common parlance, labelling every part of the mixture "anger"[40].

Dixon brings his "pluralist" view even further, questioning the very fact that different historical experiences can be easily grouped together under the banner of "anger": "as someone whose emotions were formed in the late twentieth century, I cannot recognize my own anger in the mouth-foaming, hair-raising, knuckle-cracking, teeth-grinding passions of either Seneca or Darwin"[41]. Moreover, emotion-words are not immediately translatable from one language to the other - and again anger is a case in point, as the nonnegligible difference between the English "anger" and the German "Wut" demonstrates: "*Wut* implies that the person experiencing it feels something '*very* bad,'

[39] Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions. The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003.
[40] Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Anger. The Conflicted History of an Emotion*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2020, p. 197.
[41] Dixon, "What is the History of Anger a History of?", p. 27.

rather than merely 'bad,' and also, that they are 'out of control.' For both these reasons […] *Wut* is not always translatable into English as 'anger' (and vice versa)"[42].

Another major issue is related to both the current state of the research on emotions within psychology and the neurosciences, and the many things *lost in translation* between such research and the work on emotions carried out in the humanities and the social sciences. There is no clear agreement regarding where emotions originate, how they work, how they change through time and what degree of universality they have. Furthermore, scholars within the humanities usually rely on "popularized versions" of scientific research, which in turn tend to represent findings that in the meantime may well have been challenged: "the delay between the publication of laboratory research in scientific journals and its presentation in popularizations […] is considerable. […] As a layperson, therefore, a reliance on popularizations runs the risk that one depends upon knowledge that is already obsolete"[43]. A phenomenon of this kind is evident in the ongoing popularity of Paul Ekman's theory of "basic emotions": despite it being nowadays considered "scientifically bankrupt"[44], it is still dominant at the level of media representations and popular culture[45]. Similarly, disagreement and lack of uniformity in the psychological and neuroscientific literature encourage the recourse to cherry-picking among scholars interested in generalizing about the social and political roles of emotions[46].

In order to minimize the impact of such methodological complexities on my research, I will adopt a number of precautions.

[42] Anna Wierzbicka, *Imprisoned in English. The Hazards of English as a Default Language*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, p. 81, italics in the original text.

[43] Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions. An Introduction* [2012], trans. by Keith Tribe, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015, p. 242.

[44] Ibid., pp. 149-161 (quotation at p. 158). For a detailed refutation of Ekman's view see also Ruth Leys, *The Ascent of Affect. Genealogy and Critique*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2017, chap. 2.

[45] Barbara H. Rosenwein and Riccardo Cristiani, *What is the History of Emotions?*, Polity, Cambridge 2018, pp. 112-116.

[46] Plamper, *The History of Emotions*, pp. 225-240; Dixon, "What is the History of Anger a History of?", pp. 27-28.

To avoid lexical anachronism, I will usually use the older and less historically charged word "feeling" instead of "emotion"[47]. While – for reasons that will become clear in the next chapter – I will sometimes employ "anger" and "rage" as having roughly the same meaning, I won't make use of "wrath", "fury", "resentment" and other notions too quickly equated with anger. When making reference to specific political events and authors, I will rely mainly on the US and UK contexts – where no translation of "anger" or "rage" will be needed. If, as in this Introduction and again in Chapter 7, a reference to the politics of other countries will be made at length, the correspondence between the feeling-word at stake (the Italian *rabbia*, the Spanish *rabia*) and "anger" will always have been checked in advance.

As for the application of the same notion of anger across different times and spaces, I have relied on three criteria. The first is Barbara Rosenwein's notion of *emotional communities*, defined as

> [L]argely the same as social communities – families, neighbourhoods, syndicates, academic institutions, monasteries, factories, platoons, princely courts. But the researcher looking at them seeks above all to uncover systems of feeling, to establish what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them (for it is about such things that people express emotions); the emotions that they value, devalue, or ignore; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore[48].

Each of us, according to this view, participates in many emotional communities, some more influential and stable than others. Significantly, Rosenwein claims that "many of the practices, habits, and values of an emotional community persist (sometimes fully, sometimes transformed, sometimes repurposed) over centuries"[49]. Even when feelings do vary across time, then, our belonging to certain emotional communities whose scope

[47] Plamper himself uses them as synonyms (see *The History of Emotions*, p. 12).
[48] Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions", in *Passions in Context* I, 2010, p. 11.
[49] Rosenwein and Cristiani, *What is the History of Emotions?*, p. 109.

well exceeds our individual lives (e.g. a nation, a church) makes their change more a matter of "traveling" than of "leaping forward"[50]. Similarly, advances in mobility and communication technologies have increased both the number and the breadth of the emotional communities that we join, making us more familiar with ways of conceiving and experiencing feelings different from our own.

Cognizant of this notion, most of the political examples and case-studies that appear throughout this dissertation will come from a fairly limited time span (from the second half of the twentieth century to our days) and a small number of so-called Western countries (the USA, UK, Argentina and Italy). This makes it plausible to believe that the conception of anger at stake in them is largely the same. In fact, it could even be affirmed that many of the political and intellectual figures populating my research inhabited overlapping emotional communities – this was surely the case of the protagonists of chapters 4 to 6, as Solanas, Malcolm X and Lorde all happened to live in New York in the 1960s.

When taking into account events covering more ambitious distances in space and time, I will resort to two other criteria. First, I will keep the advantage of references that tend to stay the same in the long run. Such a strategy will be employed in Chapter 1, where I will analyse the persistence (and transformations) of the etymological and political nexus between "rage" and "rabies". Since the latter is a virus whose aetiology and symptoms have been consistently observed for millennia, its relationship with rage will allow the adoption of an unconventionally wide timeframe. Finally, in Chapter 3 I will knowingly resort to an anachronism: in taking the Ancient Cynics as an example of philosophical anger I won't maintain that they would have necessarily described themselves as "angry" – something for which the Greeks had several words and which they expressed in forms often quite different than ours[51]. Rather, I affirm that their behaviour, as described by ancient sources and rediscovered in the 1980s by Michel

[50] Ibid., p. 110.

[51] E.g. Dixon, "What is the History of Anger a History of?", pp. 12-16.

Foucault, roughly matches a contemporary, 'Western' definition of anger. While historically grounded, such a claim retains within my research a role that will be more exemplary than historical.

In concluding this Introduction, I would like to stress that I remain agnostic about current scientific debates regarding emotions (e.g. those concerning to what extent anger is hard-wired in the brain, or whether it begins in the body rather than in language): the view I will defend in what follows doesn't need any particular theory of emotions to be true (or false).

Chapter 1. Metaphors that Bite

Rage, Rabies, and the Inseparability of Illness and Metaphor

Susan Sontag famously warned us against the metaphorical rendition of illness, following which "any disease that is treated as a mystery and acutely enough feared will be felt to be morally, if not literally, contagious"[52]:

> Any important disease whose causality is murky, and for which treatment is ineffectual, tends to be awash in significance. First, the subjects of deepest dread (corruption, decay, pollution, anomie, weakness) are identified with the disease. The disease itself becomes a metaphor. Then, in the name of the disease (that is, using it as a metaphor), that horror is imposed on other things. The disease becomes adjectival. Something is said to be disease-like, meaning that it is disgusting or ugly. [53]

Generally speaking, one cannot but welcome her warning – ever more so in the midst of the worst pandemic in a century. Nonetheless, it seems especially hard to go by her suggestion when dealing with anger, and in particular with its most radical eruptions, which in English correspond to the notion of *rage*[54]. In several European languages, in fact, there is only one word for both *rage* (a feeling) and *rabies* (a virus), and this has been the case for so long that it is not even possible to establish which acceptation came first. Rage, in other words, has always been at the same time illness *and* metaphor, a muddle of meanings and references where medicine and politics, knowledge and power

[52] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 1978, p. 6.
[53] Ibid., p.58.
[54] While acknowledging the different nuances between *anger* and *rage*, in what follows I use the two terms largely as synonyms. Indeed, one of the aims of the present chapter is precisely to develop a critique of the pathologisation of such a feeling, which a sharp distinction between anger (generally conceived as individual) and rage (often taken to be collective) only makes easier. A similar choice has been defended by Myisha Cherry in her study of anti-racist rage: see *The Case for Rage. Why Anger is Essential to Anti-Racist Struggle*, Oxford University Press, New York 2021, p. 16.

are inextricably entangled. The very distinction between a pathological side and a metaphorical one would have proven impossible for a quite a long time[55].

Nowadays we know that rabies is a viral disease which, in the majority of species including our own, kills almost every individual that gets it[56]. While the first accounts of its spreading are millennia-old, it was only in the late nineteenth century that, thanks to Louis Pasteur, a vaccine was found and gradually became available. Today, rabies still claims between ten and twenty thousand lives every year (mostly in Africa and Asia, but with recent outbreaks in Latin America, too)[57]. Among the animals usually associated - from a medical as well as a cultural standpoint - with this disease, foremost are dogs, wolves and bats. Indeed, rabies constitutes one of the most ancient occurrences of *zoonosis* – when a pathogen leaps from some nonhuman animal into a person, and succeeds there in establishing itself as an infectious presence, sometimes causing illness or death[58].

Among the Ancient Greeks the link between the feral animality of rabies and the anthropological dimension of rage was already in place. If it is well-known that the *Iliad* begins with one of several Greek words expressing the notion of anger (*menis*), it is rarely mentioned that, within Homeric poems, some of the most intense eruptions of anger were described with the same term (*lyssa*, from *lukos*, wolf[59]) used by physicians for rabies[60] – a pathology which affected people bitten by a dog or a wolf[61]. In moving from Ancient Greek to Latin, *lyssa* (a word still existing in medical English) was generally translated as *rabies*, from which the Italian *rabbia*, the French *rage*, the

[55] Bill Wasik, Monica Murphy, *Rabid. A Cultural History of the World's Most Diabolic Virus*, Penguin, New York 2012, p. 56.

[56] Ibid., p. 3.

[57] Particularly significant is the recent outbreak in Venezuela (2007-2008), analysed in Charles L. Briggs, Clara Mantini-Briggs, *Tell Me Why My Children Died. Rabies, Indigenous Knowledge, and Communicative Justice*, Duke University Press, Durham 2016.

[58] David Quammen, *Spillover. Animal Infections and the Next Human Pandemic*, W. W. Norton, New York 2012, § 1.3.

[59] The most authoritative study on the etymology of *lyssa* remains the one by Bruce Lincoln ("Homeric λύσσα: Wolfish Rage", in Id., *Death, War, and Sacrifice: Studies in Ideology and Practice*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1991 pp. 131-137).

[60] See Gregory Nagy, "On cases of wolfish rage experienced by Greek heroes", in *Classical Inquires*, 24/5/2019.

[61] Wasik, Murphy, *Rabid*, Ibid., pp. 16-17.

Spanish *rabia* (all pointing to *both* the feeling *and* the pathology)[62]. However, during antiquity such a mixture of animal and human elements was not always characterized in the same way. While it is true that lyssa-rabies featured a component of excess, on the other hand it could also carry, at the same time, an element of heroism, or the reference to a super-human type of strength[63-64].

To complicate things further, we must register the heterogeneity between the ways in which rabies is contracted (typically from a bite) and its symptoms, which in the absence of advanced medical knowledge couldn't but appear as hitting the psyche more than the body. People affected by it showed a seemingly inexplicable repulsion for water (hydrophobia), made sudden and not fully voluntary movements, experienced hallucinations, and sometimes behaved violently towards others. These continuous oscillations between the psychic and the somatic, as well as those between illness and metaphor, survived long after the end of antiquity, as confirmed by the episodic but meaningful mentions of *rage* in Foucault's *Histoire de la folie à l'âge Classique*. Foucault was well aware that, during the XVII and XVIII centuries, doctors considered rabies a form of mental illness – but he also knew that, behind the lists of "morbid forms of madness" were mostly what were considered "deformations of the moral life"[65]. When the French term *rage* appears in his text, usually as a sign of the fool's purported bestiality, it is therefore not always clear whether it is mentioned as a disease in itself (rabies), as an intense instance of a feeling (anger) that madness would exacerbate, or as something in between (a state which analogically recalls the symptoms of rabies, but in fact is just the form that rage takes in those considered fools). Paradoxically, such a lack of a sharp distinction between illness and metaphor makes Foucault's occasional remarks potentially more fruitful than those of scholars who

[62] Cf. Ibid., p. 54.

[63] Ibid., p. 17.

[64] Cf. Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time. A Psychopolitical Investigation* (2006), trans. by M. Wenning, Columbia University Press, New York 2010, pp. 1-13. Sloterdijk's reading of Greek antiquity is problematic because he repeatedly reduces rage (*menis*, *lyssa*) to what Plato called the appetitive component of the soul (*thymos*), which on the other hand encompassed a significantly wider array of feelings.

[65] Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge Classique* [1961], Gallimard, Paris 1972, pp. 210-214.

devoted way longer historical analyses to anger but did not recognize the complex, long-lasting link between rage and rabies[66].

Towards the end of his book, Foucault touched upon a topic that had a long tradition within the history of political thought and would become, between the end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX centuries, one of the most influential entanglements of illness and metaphor in the historical trajectory of anger. Referring to the interpretation of the "rage of [French] revolutionaries" as an example of madness[67], he highlighted for a moment the topic of *social contagion* and its close relationship with the long-lasting fear of enraged and politically rebellious masses.

Such a relationship already emerged in the pages of one of the founding works of Western political thought – Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*. There, *rage* is described as a form of madness resulting from an excess of anger[68]. According to Hobbes, while individual rage may not always be easy to detect (as it does not necessarily produce a "very extravagant action"), "the rage of the whole multitude is visible enough":

> [What] argument of Madnesse can there be greater, than to clamour, strike, and throw stones at our best friends? Yet this is somewhat less than such a multitude will do. For they will clamour, fight against and destroy those, by whom all their life-time before, they have been protected, and secured from injury. And if this be Madnesse in the multitude, it is the same in every particular man[69].

As this passage reminds us, Hobbes is the "sworn enemy" of the *multitude*: in his view, the latter constitutes the greatest danger for that monopoly of political decision-making that is the state[70]. Differently from the *people*, which "is somewhat that is one,

[66] This is the case of the nonetheless insightful book by Rosenwein, *Anger. The Conflicted History of an Emotion*.

[67] Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge Classique*, p. 500. The context is that of the inspection of the Bicêtre asylum by Georges Couthon, one of the masterminds of that period of the French revolution known as The Terror. On the role of anger during Terror see Sophie Wahnich, *In Defence of the Terror. Liberty or Death in the French Revolution*, Verso, London-New York, 2012.

[68] "Pride, subjecthed a man to Anger, the excesse whereof, is the Madness called Rage, and Fury" (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* [1651], ed. by R. Tuck, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, p. 54).

[69] Ibid., pp. 54-55.

[70] Cf. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude. For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. by I. Bertoletti, J. Cascaito, A. Casson, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles 2004, pp. 21-23.

having one will, and to whom one action may be attributed", the multitude has none of those features[71]. Refusing to obey any central authority, the enraged multitude threatens to put an end to the very existence of the civil state and to bring everybody into the state of nature, where every man is at war with any other[72]. Only madness could explain, in Hobbes's view, the willingness to rebel against that Leviathan which has citizens "protected and secured from injury". Rage is here considered as a pathological state, but the connection with rabies is not yet explicit. Later on, Hobbes brings his argument one step further: while writing on the risks of a rebellion of the multitude against monarchy, he claims that allowing the reading of Greek and Latin anti-monarchic texts may be particularly dangerous. In so doing, he makes an analogy between democratic ideas and the madness caused by the virus of rabies, then also called hydrophobia after one of its symptoms:

I cannot imagine, how anything can be more prejudiciall to a Monarchy, than the allowing of such books to be publikely read, without present applying such correctives of discreet Masters, as are fit to take away their Venime. Which Venime I will not doubt to compare to the biting of a mad Dogge, which is a disease the Physicians call Hydrophobia. For as he that is so bitten, has a continuall torment of thirst, and yet abhorreth water; and is in such an estate, as if the poyson endeavoured to convert him into a Dogge: So when a Monarchy is once bitten to the quick, by those Democraticall writers, that continually snarle at that estate; it wanteth nothing more than a strong Monarch, which neverthelesse out of a certain Tyrannophobia, or feare of being strongly governed, when they have him, they abhorre[73].

The topic of social contagion, with the juxtaposition of the viral spread of rabies and that of anti-monarchic feelings among the masses, is already looming in these lines[74].

[71] Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive* [1642], ed. by H. Warrender, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1987, pp. 151-152.

[72] "Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man" (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 88).

[73] Ibid., p. 226.

[74] Diego Rossello has claimed that Hobbes's foray into the politics of rabies didn't happen by chance – indeed, Hobbes is famous for claiming that "Man to Man is an arrant Wolfe" (*De Cive*, p. 24), and we know that wolves were often associated

What Hobbes lacked was a theory to explain his claim according to which political rage could actually circulate as a disease without recurring to the unlikely influence of Ancient Greek texts among a largely illiterate multitude. Two centuries later, a whole new field of study was born precisely around that concern: the *psychology of crowds* started from the assumption that intense and violent feelings could propagate from one individual to another. Interestingly enough, this new subject entered the stage at the same time when radical public health measures were being taken in both France and England to prevent rabies epidemics.

From the Psychology of Crowds to the Psychiatry of Radicalism

In Paris, fear of rabies prompted bloody *canicides* – almost ten thousand dogs were killed in 1879 alone[75]. In Liverpool, three hundred were exterminated in one single week in 1866[76]. However, the number of people actually infected by rabies could hardly explain those measures: between 1850 and 1872, in France the known victims were on average twenty-five per year[77], while it has been estimated that in 1886 only one in four hundred physicians had had a first-hand contact with rabies[78]. Probably no more than 0.025% of people who thought they had rabies in France had actually contracted it.[79] Another factor must therefore be taken into account: the climate of panic produced, especially in urban contexts, by the mere news that a dog could be a carrier of the disease. In England, screaming crowds running from a supposedly rabid animal, or chasing dogs in a given neighbourhood, were as much a source of alarm and fear as the

with rabies. See Rossello, "Hobbes and the Wolf-Man: Melancholy and Animality in Modern Sovereignty", in *New Literary History* 43, 2012, especially pp. 270-271.

[75] Bill Wasik, Monica Murphy, *Rabid*, p. 100.

[76] Neil Pemberton, Michael Worboys, *Mad Dogs and Englishmen. Rabies in Britain, 1830-2000*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2007, p. 78.

[77] Kathleen Kete, "*La Rage* and the Bourgeoisie: The Cultural Context of Rabies and the French Nineteenth Century", in *Representations* 22, 1988, p. 89.

[78] Ibid., p. 101.

[79] Ibid.

disease itself[80]. This gives us a sense of the markedly class-based nature of the fight against rabies in both countries: it was mainly the (often not purebred) dogs of working-class families that were held responsible for the circulation of the terrible disease and which were thus considered to be badly kept [81].

Illness and metaphor then extended their mortal embrace to the figure of the *crowd*, in which rage-as-a-pathology and rage-as-a-feeling, the distinction between proletarians and bourgeois no less than that between healthy and sick were inexorably intertwined. A crowd is not just any group of people: it is as low in social status as it is in morals, as noisy as a pack of howling dogs (or those who run away from it), as susceptible to sudden and irrational upheaval as the individual infected by the deadliest of viruses. If the person who contracted rabies made movements and uttered words against her will, the crowd was characterised by, in Le Bon's words, "the predominance of the unconscious personality, the turning of feelings and ideas in an identical direction by means of suggestion and contagion, the tendency to immediately transform the suggested ideas into acts"[82]. Like illness, which represented an alteration of the body or mind, the crowd provided a vivid illustration of the altered state of society and of the individuals within it[83].

In the wake of the huge success achieved at the end of the XIX century by writings by Le Bon and other contemporary authors, such as Gabriel Tarde[84] and Scipio Sighele[85], the psychology of crowds became, despite its lack of scientific rigour[86], an instrument

[80] Pemberton, Worboys, *Mad Dogs and Englishmen*, p. 74.

[81] Ibid., pp. 26-33; 48-49; 54-56; 150-151; 198-199 and Kete, "*La Rage* and the Bourgeoisie", p. 100.

[82] Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd. A Study of the Popular Mind* [1895], Dover Publications, Mineola 2002, p. 8.

[83] Sabina Curti, *Critica della folla*, Pearson, Milan 2018, p. 32. It is interesting to notice that even an author far from psychological interpretations of the crowd, such as Canetti, repeatedly underlines the conceptual kinship between the notion of *mass* and that of *pack* (*Die Meute*), a term that in German, as well as in English, can mean both a group of soldiers and a group of hunting dogs (hence also the specific form *Die Jadgmeute*, 'hunting pack'). Cf. Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* [1960], trans. by C. Stewart, Continuum, New York 1981, §§ 2-3.

[84] Gabriel Tarde, *L'opinion et la foule* [1901], Éditions Le Mono, Champhol 2021.

[85] Scipio Sighele, *The Criminal Crowd and Other Writings* [1891], ed. by N. Pireddu, Toronto University Press, Toronto 2018.

[86] Curti, *Critica della folla*, especially chap. 6. Interesting remarks can also be found in the classic study by Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason,* Verso, London-New York 2005, chap. 2.

through which the most advantaged members of society denied and repressed the political nature of the manifestations of anger of the lower classes, trying to prevent the formation of a shared class consciousness among them. As Walter Benjamin had already guessed, such an approach reduced any possible instance of mass politics to the demands of the petit-bourgeoisie which, because of its indefinite social position, halfway between the bourgeoisie proper and the proletariat, was particularly prone to leaning in one or the other direction on the basis of extemporaneous factors[87]. In a way, the psychology of crowds thrived thanks to its own theoretical weakness: its proponents used notions such as *crowd*, *mass* and *multitude* as synonyms, referring to a plethora of different phenomena (revolts, gatherings in public spaces, theatre audiences, military ranks)[88]. Differently from reactionary writers of the previous century, who had themselves produced animalistic and caricatural depictions of enraged revolutionary multitudes[89], crowd psychologists could however point to actual social dynamics (from rapid urbanization to the development of the first mass media) that seemed in line with their analysis[90].

[87] "The mass as an impenetrable, compact entity, which Le Bon and others have made the subject of their 'mass psychology,' is that of the petty bourgeoisie. The petty bourgeoisie is not a class; it is in fact only a mass. And the greater the pressure on it between the two antagonistic classes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the more compact it becomes. In this mass the emotional element described in mass psychology is indeed a determining factor. But for that very reason this compact mass forms the antithesis of the proletarian class which obeys a collective ratio" (Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility. Second Version" [1935-1936], in Id., *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writing on Media*, ed. by M.W. Jennings, P. Doherty, T. Y. Levin, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Ma) 2008, p. 50).

[88] See Damiano Palano, "Pensare la folla. Appunti per la ricostruzione di un itinerario terminologico e concettuale", in *Teoria Politica* XX (3), 2004, p. 17.

[89] Edmund Burke, for instance, thus wrote of the crowd exulting for the arrest of Louis XVI: "the royal captives who followed in the train were slowly moved along, amidst the horrid yells, and shrilling screams, and frantic dances, and infamous contumelies, and all the unutterable abominations of the furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest of women" (*Reflections on the Revolution in France* [1790], ed. by F.M. Turner, Yale University Press, New Haven 2003, pp. 60-61).

[90] It is worth remarking that also Freud was considerably influenced by Le Bon's psychology of crowds – to which he approvingly devoted a whole section of *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* [1921] (Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works*, ed. by J. Strachey, Hogarth Press, London 1955, pp. 72-81). The main differences between Freud's own account and Le Bon's are to be located i) in a different conception of the unconscious (Ibid., p. 75, n. 1); ii) in Freud's original explanation of the crowd's suggestibility, which he reconducted to the psychoanalytic concept of *identification*. However, Freud himself saw the relationship between a mass and its leader as analogous to that between the hypnotized and the hypnotist (Ibid., especially §§ 8 and 10).

Although suggestive, such considerations may easily appear anachronistic. The discovery of a vaccine and the understanding of how viruses work loosened the links between rabies as a pathology and rage as a feeling, gradually relegating the former to the exoticism of tropical diseases and emancipating the latter from much of the bestiality previously attributed to it. And yet, although more difficult to follow, the link between the two dimensions survives, with sometimes unprecedented violence, until our day. The following are only some of the examples available.

In the United States of the 1960s and 1970s, the link between collective anger and madness came to the fore again. Second-wave feminism, with its radical critique of certain pillars of the patriarchal order (marriage as the only possible horizon for a woman, compulsory heterosexuality, the feminisation and the unpaid character of domestic and care work, the de facto exclusion of women from the public sphere), shook the foundations of society. The media, in response, portrayed feminists as frigid, resentful, ill-tempered, creating a climate of moral panic towards them[91]. It is in such a context that psychiatry once again became a tool for the continuation of gender oppression, both in its older and disciplinary variants (asylums) and in its more modern ones (neuropharmacology). In her classic *Women and Madness*, Phyllis Chesler recounted the terrifyingly common experience of women who had been committed against their will by their husbands to some psychiatric hospital, often simply for having shown impatience or anger towards domestic tasks: having her declared insane was in those years a surprisingly common way of getting rid of a female presence judged too cumbersome[92]. Between 1969 and 1970, two of the most important figures of second-wave feminism - Angela Davis and Valerie Solanas, perhaps the "angry feminists" *par excellence* - were detained in the "mentally unstable" wing of the Women's House of

[91] Particularly iconic in this respect are the long-lasting sexist tropes of feminists setting bras on fire or as intrinsically lesbian: Jill M. Swirsky, D.J. Angelone, "Femi-Nazis and Bra Burning Crazies: A Qualitative Evaluation of Contemporary Beliefs about Feminism", in *Current Psychology* 33, 2014, pp. 229-245; Victoria Hesford, "Feminism and its ghosts. The spectre of the feminist-as-lesbian", in *Feminist Theory* 6(3), 2005, pp. 227-250.

[92] Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness*, Dubleday, New York 1972.

Detention, in New York[93]. The prison, where abuses of all kinds took place, was closed in 1971 after years of complaints, including one from another great feminist intellectual, Andrea Dworkin, who reported being sexually assaulted during a search[94].

Being considered mad was not an experience limited to women on the run from the authorities (like Davis) or struggling with mental problems (like Solanas). In the wake of the alarm caused by the rapid spread of feminist groups and initiatives, unmarried women replaced married ones as the main concern of the country's psychiatrists[95]. Anger played an important role in the promotion of a drug like Valium, which quickly became one of the most successful products in pharmaceutical history, used by seven out of every hundred women[96]. In leading academic publications such as the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Valium was advertised with a picture of a woman grinding her teeth in rage - her expression then becoming more relaxed as a result of the drug[97].

Ads of that kind did not target only the female (and possibly feminist) population: in 1974, the *Archives of General Psychiatry* carried an advertisement for the antipsychotic drug Haldol, along with a picture of a Black man with a clenched fist and mouth distorted into an angry grimace, whose facial features clearly resembled those of the African-American singer James Brown. The text of the ad left no room for doubt: Haldol was a product for controlling "assaultive and belligerent" behaviour[98]. As Jonathan Metzl demonstrates in his *The Protest Psychosis*, during the 1960s and 1970s

[93] "The week I spent in 4b was far worse than my worst fantasies of solitary confinement. It was torture to be surrounded by these women who urgently needed professional help. It was all the more torturous because each time I tried to help one of them out of her misery, I would discover that a wall - far more impervious than the walls of our cells - stood between us. I could not keep from becoming depressed myself when their "doctor" came to examine them - he simply prescribed larger doses of Thorazine, chloral hydrate, or other tranquilizers" (Angela Davis, *An Autobiography* [1974], International Publishers, New York 1988, p. 36). See also Breanne Fahs, *Valerie Solanas. The Defiant Life of the Woman Who Wrote SCUM (and Shot Andy Warhol)*, The Feminist Press, New York 2014, pp. 229-230.

[94] Sara Harris, *Hellhole. The shocking story of the inmates and life in the New York City House of Detention for Women*, Dutton, New York 1967; Andrea Dworkin, *Heartbreak. The Political Memoir of a Feminist Militant*, Basic Books, New York 2002, pp. 77-81.

[95] Jonathan M. Metzl, *Prozac on the Couch. Prescribing Gender in the Era of Wonder Drugs*, Duke University Press, Durham 2003, p. 145.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., pp. 15-17, 131, 151.

[98] Jonathan M. Metzl, *The Protest Psychosis. How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease*, Beacon Press, Boston 2009, pp. xiv-xv.

schizophrenia became "the pathology of Black male hostility", as psychiatrists developed explicit connections between militancy in the civil rights movement and mental illness: African Americans, Metzl writes, "contracted" schizophrenia not only and not so much by virtue of specific symptoms, but "because of civil rights"[99].

The term "schizophrenia" had come to the United States from Europe around 1915 and for almost half a century, both in specialist discourse and in common perception, it represented a disorder that afflicted predominantly white middle-class people (few studies were conducted among the Black population), especially women. In 1968, however, the new edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) included aggressive masculinity and antisocial behaviour among its symptoms, offering an implicitly racist description of its symptomatology in a political scenario where there was already a tendency to pathologize forms of antiracist protest. In a series of then classified documents, the FBI branded the religious and political leader Malcolm X, known as "the angriest Negro [sic] in America", as schizophrenic - while in the public debate the use of this psychiatric condition served to distinguish moderate African American activists from those considered more dangerous. Thus, while on the one hand US asylums began to be gradually closed, on the other they could be filled during the very same years with hundreds of Black men whose medical records noted support for anti-racist groups such as Black Power among the symptoms[100]. Fifty years later, Black people in the United States continue to be diagnosed with schizophrenia far more frequently than white people, despite the current belief that this happens mostly due to medical bias[101].

These two examples provide us with a further variation on the pairing of illness and metaphor, where anger-as-a-feeling nominally serves as a diagnostic criterion for ascertaining a pathological condition - which, however, turns out to be merely the

[99] Ibid., p. xv. e pp. 100-106 e p 94.

[100] Ibid., p. xviii e p. xiii; pp. 97-98; 117; 121-122; 145-159.

[101] E.g. Elena K. Schwartz et al., "Exploring the racial diagnostic bias of schizophrenia using behavioral and clinical-based measures", in *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 128(3), 2019, pp. 263-271.

metaphorical representation of a form of structural injustice. What makes this circumstance particularly insidious is that the pathologization of female (and feminist) and Black (and anti-racist) anger went hand in hand with scientific advances, that is to say with the shift from a psychiatry based on asylum internment to one that was opening up to modern pharmacology. The correlations between illness and metaphor, therefore, do not lend themselves to a narrative of linear progress (in which the potential confusion between the two planes would progressively diminish) but show, in the context of anger, an irregular and at times recursive pattern. If similar dynamics can be observed in highly codified fields such as psychiatry, it is not surprising that they remain even more common in areas of knowledge that operate with necessarily higher levels of approximation, such as the study of crowds' behaviour.

Mad Mobs and Englishmen. The 2011 English Riots

In this connection, the English language offers a suggestive phrase about rabies: *mad dogs and Englishmen*. The original reference appears in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, where we read at the beginning of the fifth chapter that only rabid dogs (*devils*, in the terminology of the novel) and Englishmen go around without reason when the sun is still high[102]. The best-known formulation (the one where rabies-infected animals become *mad dogs*) is from a popular 1930s song and would later reappear in record and movie titles and - more recently - historical studies on the spread of rabies in England. The phrase does not have a strict meaning, but is sometimes used in its first acceptation as referring to a particularly hot climate and the fact that, unlike other peoples, the English do not have the habit of taking a nap in the afternoon – therefore going around despite the heat. A particularly significant variation of the expression was used by sociologist Cliff Stott and psychologist Stephen Reicher in their 2011 book, in which they playfully referred to "mad *mobs* and Englishmen" in reference to the urban riots

[102] Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* [1901], Macmillan, London 2016, p. 130.

that inflamed the country that year. Surprisingly, Reicher and Stott did not seem aware of the significance of their semantic choice, which indirectly recalled the terror of rabies contagion in a study aimed at dismantling the latest declination of the myth of the enraged and irrational crowd[103]. Indeed, their book analyses the persistence of what Sabina Curti describes as "the nineteenth-century, negative and criminogenic conception of the crowd"[104].

On August 4th 2011, in the London Borough of Tottenham, the police killed a 29-year-old Black man, Mark Duggan, in circumstances that a decade later remain unclear[105]. For the following two days, the police failed to pass on any information to the victim's family, despite repeated requests. A peaceful protest was then organised outside the nearest police station on August 6th. The officers took time, asking the protesters to wait until a colleague arrived who could provide them with information about the case. Several hours followed and no officer showed up. The situation, which until then had been completely under control, came to a head when the police tried to disperse the crowd, also hitting two unarmed women. After mutual pushing and throwing of objects, it was not long before a number of police vehicles were burnt. Over the next three days the rioting, looting and burning spread first to other areas of London (such as Hackney, Croydon, Ealing), then to other English cities. The final toll was 5 dead, many injured and hundreds of millions in damage, caused by sudden, apparently uncoordinated actions that usually lasted no more than a few hours.

[103] There are no comments in the book about the choice of title.

[104] Curti, *Critica della folla*, p. 183.

[105] See the monumental inquiry by the research group Forensic Architecture (*The killing of Mark Duggan*, 9/6/2020, available here: https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-killing-of-mark-duggan) and the report made by *The Guardian* (Haroon Siddique, "Mark Duggan police shooting: can forensic tech cast doubt on official report?", in *The Guardian*, 10/6/2020). The police have recently refused to reopen their investigation in the wake of the new evidence gathered by the inquiry (Haroon Siddique, "Mark Duggan's family: police 'lack courage' to reopen investigation", in *The Guardian*, 28/5/2021). In October 2019 a settlement, the terms of which remain confidential, was reached between Duggan's family and the Metropolitan Police in the civil lawsuit for damages filed by the victim's relatives ("Mark Duggan shooting: family settle high court claim against Met", in *The Guardian*, 10/10/2019).

The reactions of the media and political parties, summarised by Reicher and Stott[106], showed no real effort to understand the events: both Conservatives and Labour described the riots as purely criminal outbursts in which juvenile delinquents and long-term offenders had grabbed or destroyed everything that came their way. More or less veiled racist clichés (the areas where it all started were mainly populated by Black or minority people) bounced from one commentary to another: the violence was the consequence of the uncontrolled and immoral rage of suburban youth, of dysfunctional families with absent fathers and mothers who survived on state benefits, of an education system in disarray, of the harmful influence of consumerism, etc. The only, minor disagreement between the ruling party and the opposition concerned the intensity of the measures to be taken for the surveillance and repression of certain areas of the country. Not without irony, a wave of protests that began with the killing of a man at the hands of the police quickly turned into a proof of the need for more aggressive policing.

Many questions remained unanswered, however, and they began to arise when those arrested during the riots appeared in court: they were not the hardened street criminals that public opinion had been pointing at for days, but dramatically "respectable" figures (a promising young athlete, a dental nurse, law students, a ballet dancer, and so on). In the light of such details, maintaining a total condemnation of the riots required the open adoption of a XIX-century-style crowd psychology, as became clear in a significant article published in the *Observer* by the epidemiologist Gary Slutkin. The latter, who up to that point had worked mainly on AIDS, cholera and tuberculosis, defended the correctness of the equation between the spread of violence and an epidemic caused by a pathogen: "Once the [violent] event is triggered, it moves from person to person, block to block, town to town"[107]. As well-intentioned as Slutkin seemed to be (he realised, for

[106] See the references collected in Steve Reicher, Cliff Stott, *Mad Mobs and Englishmen? Myths and Realities of the 2011 Riots*, Constable & Robinson, London 2011, chap. 1.

[107] Gary Slutkin, "Gary Slutkin: rioting is a disease spread from person to person – the key is to stop the infection", in *The Observer*, 14/8/2011. In later years, Slutkin and co-researchers developed a research agenda based on the equation of violence and contagious disease (see, among others: Gary Slutkin, Charles Ransford, Daria Zvetina, "How the Health Sector Can Reduce Violence by Treating it as a Contagion", in *AMA Journal of Ethics* 20(1), 2018, pp. 47-55). As objected by Michael B. Greene, such a conceptualisation is wrong both literally (as violence is not 'contagious' in the very material

example, that simply tightening police protocols would not solve the problems raised by urban violence), the rhetoric at work in his argument reproduced the theses of authors such as Le Bon and Tarde. He argued, in fact, that microbiological and social phenomena could be understood with the same methodology. As noted by Peta Mitchell in her study of the metaphor of contagion, for Slutkin to speak of an epidemic in relation to the London riots was not figurative, but purely descriptive[108]: the wave of protests had been a full-blown infection - which made the protesters little more than pathogenic micro-organisms against which to mobilise the most effective immune response.

The situation was, predictably, more complex. Haringey, the borough within which Tottenham is located, was at the time the thirteenth poorest area in England. In January 2011, the borough council announced a 75% cut in spending on youth services (after-school care, leisure centres, job-search assistance). During the hottest months of the year, youngsters took to the streets for lack of alternatives. The police saw this as a source of increased crime and stopped 6894 people between April and June - in 6807 cases without finding any illegality. In the UK, a Black person was then 26 times more likely to be the subject of such a stop than a white person[109]. A likely explanation thus emerges: the combination of cuts to the welfare state and police methods perceived as highly discriminatory enacted what Loïc Wacquant would call the neoliberal symbiosis between the *invisible hand* of the market and the *iron fist* of the state.[110] The killing of Mark Duggan triggered the explosion of a social anger that was already there.

Even the seemingly illogical way in which the riots took hold in London and spread to many other places was - as several studies have shown - motivated by precise reasons:

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sense a disease is) and metaphorically (because it downplays the socially structural triggers of violence, from racism to poverty). See Greene, "Metaphorically or Not, Violence Is Not a Contagious Disease", in *AMA Journal of Ethics* 20(5), 2018, pp. 513-515. Moreover, Slutkin's framework makes no distinction between violence expressed in the context of political participation (e.g. riots) and types of violence that have nothing to do with that (e.g. child abuse). In so doing, it cannot recognize that sometimes violence plays an important (and potentially positive) political role. In the next chapter, I will deal with the complex relationship between violence and anger.

[108] Peta Mitchell, *Contagious Metaphor*, Bloomsbury, London 2012, p. 61.

[109] All data mentioned in the paragraph come from Steve Reicher, Cliff Stott, *Mad Mobs and Englishmen?*, chap. 4.

[110] Loïc Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor. The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*, Duke University Press, Durham 2009, p. 6.

the protesters were mostly from economically deprived urban areas where the behaviour of the police was considered oppressive[111], while their main targets were not shops but police cars and public buildings[112]. The means through which the authorities deal with certain manifestations of social anger, however, continue to be as obsolete as they are inadequate, in the UK and elsewhere: in Italy, as shown by Enrico Gargiulo, police officers still have to study on manuals that are full of the pseudo-scientific claims of the psychology of crowds[113].

The link between illness and metaphor that Sontag invited us to weaken as much as possible has marked and continues to mark the historical trajectory of (individual and especially collective) anger, affecting in particular those belonging to groups that experience socially structural forms of injustice. This circumstance has made it necessary, to understand the political role of rage, to consider it also as pathology, symptom, disorder. The "contagious" threat of anger spreading among the population has historically been followed by a series of reactions that are not mutually exclusive, ranging from medicalisation to police repression.

However, it would be reductive to stop at this level of analysis, at the official narratives offered to us by the state or by some sectors of the scientific community. For a long time, oppressed people have developed counter-discourses aimed at explaining their anger and increasing its potential for social change, with sometimes positive results. At the same time, they are still confronted, especially when raising the level of their demands, with the anger acted out in response by social groups defending certain forms of injustice. On these issues we must now focus our attention.

[111] Juta Kawalerowicz, Michael Biggs, "Anarchy in the UK: Economic Deprivation, Social Disorganization, and Political Grievances in the London Riot of 2011", in *Social Forces* 94(2), 2015, pp. 673-698.

[112] Ferdinand Sutterlüty, "The hidden morale of the 2005 French and 2011 English riots", in *Thesis Eleven* 121(1), 2014, pp. 40; 45.

[113] Enrico Gargiulo, "Ordine pubblico, regole private. Rappresentazioni della folla e prescrizioni comportamentali nei manuali per i Reparti mobili", in *Etnografia e ricerca qualitativa* 3, 2015, pp. 481-511.

Chapter 2. Towards a Ballistics of Anger

Reclaiming the Anger of the Oppressed. From Radical Feminism to Militant Anti-Racism

The archive of structural injustice is deep and full of connections. Already at the beginning of the 1970s, to criticize the *etiquette of oppression* described in the Introduction, Shulamith Firestone claimed that she dreamt of an innovative mode of feminist protest: "a *smile boycott*, declaring which all women would instantly abandon their 'pleasing' smiles, henceforth smiling only when something pleased *them*"[114]. Freeing oneself from the subtle form of internalised oppression represented by the obligation to smile at others - especially men - in order to put them at ease, required a considerable amount of "training". All the more so for those who, like Firestone herself, came from a rigidly patriarchal family background[115]. Refraining from what is perhaps the most immediate sign of a positive disposition towards others also meant affirming the visibility of anger, responding to a (male) stranger's harassing comment ("Baby, you're looking good today!") with a blunt reply ("No better than when I didn't know you"[116]).

The wording deserves attention here: rather than calling for a *strike*, a momentary or indefinite suspension of smiling, Firestone was thinking of a *boycott* - that is, the kind of tactic one usually deploys against the products of a certain brand. One would thus

[114] Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex. The Case for Feminist Revolution*, Bantam Books, New York 1971, p. 90. Some psychological studies have since confirmed that people with low power feel more obligated to smile in social settings than people with high power: see e.g. Marvin A. Hecht, Marianne LaFrance, "License or Obligation to Smile: The Effect of Power and Sex on the Amount and Type of Smile", in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 24(12), 1998, pp. 1332-1442. For LaFrance's indebtedness to radical feminism see her "Smile Boycott and Other Body Politics", in *Feminism & Psychology* 12(3) 2002, pp. 319-323. Moreover, Arlie Russell Hochschild has famously shown that female workers in the service economy are regularly asked to smile on their jobs (and to really *feel* it): *The Managed Hearth. Commercialization of Human Feeling*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2012, 3rd edition, esp. pp. 4-8; 33-34; 89-96; 104-105; 127-128, 201.

[115] Cf. Susan Faludi, "Death of a Revolutionary", in *The New Yorker*, 15/4/2013, pp. 52-61.

[116] Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 89.

avoid buying, say, the clothes made by a company known for its overexploitation of labour, but not all other kinds of clothes. Similarly, a smile boycott does not imply to stop smiling, but only to do so when one really feels like it. The anger at stake in the boycott is not merely reactive, but desirous, as it does not simply aim at the removal of a constraint (being forced to smile all the time), but also at finding *actual* reasons to smile.

It is no coincidence that Firestone was one of the first promoters in the United States of radical feminism, which saw women as an oppressed class and the cultural and social asymmetries between the sexes as a reality to be abolished, rather than reformed[117]. Radical feminists, unlike their liberal counterparts, typically identified anger as more of a resource than an obstacle, making it a key element of their political practice and struggling to create a language to communicate the state of mind resulting from the knowledge of one's oppression and the rebellion against it[118]. In a recent interview Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, one of the leaders of the Boston-based collective Cell 16, recalled how in the 1970s for her and her feminist comrades the alternative was between the self-destructive internalisation of anger (depression, drug abuse, internment in psychiatric institutions) and its free expression (through forms of activism based on direct action, the promotion of women-only self-awareness groups, and fierce criticism of the episodes of sexism experienced in daily life)[119]. In her words, as in those of so much radical feminism, the idea emerges that there can be something healthy in giving voice to one's anger - that getting angry is good for you. It remains expressed on a mainly metaphorical level: if you don't let off steam you withdraw into yourself and tend to isolate; if you do, you don't keep it all inside and take a less passive approach to your existence. At times, however, this idea seems to imply something more: the fact that a less self-censoring management of anger is *literally* a matter of health.

[117] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

[118] Breanne Fahs, *Firebrand Feminism. The Radical Lives of Ti-Grace Atkinson, Kathie Sarachild, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and Dana Densmore*, University of Washington Press, Seattle 2018, pp. 36-37; 52.

[119] Ibid., pp. 40-41.

In the decades since the pioneering activities of Cell 16 and the hundreds of similar groups that formed during the same period, what was a mere intuition has been proven by a large body of scientific research, well reported by Soraya Chemaly. It is now established that the inability to voice anger is a significant component of both depression and anxiety, conditions that are diagnosed far more frequently in women than in men, while the higher rate of mental distress in women is confirmed by studies showing that they systematically experience more anger than men (although this does not imply that they manifest it as frequently, far from it). In addition, unexpressed anger increases the perception of physical pain and is somatised in myriad ways, also leading to self-harming health decisions in the treatment of serious illnesses. By the time a woman reaches middle age, the main predictors of her health status are her stress levels and her tendency to pour her anger on herself - a situation which is more common among those who have internalised misogynistic beliefs. Evidence like this becomes even more relevant when we take into account the number of people who consider the expression of female anger "appropriate" in a country such as the US - a staggering 6.2%[120]. Radical feminism offers then a perfect example of the political reclaiming and re-signification of the same anger that was, and in part still is, used to brand as crazy those women who dare to express it.

Anti-racism, on the other hand, operated around the same time another reversal, thanks to which the anger of non-white people went from being a pretext for strategies of repression and medicalisation to a lens for reading the contradictions of societies based on structural forms of injustice[121]. Robert Williams, a historical figure in the US Civil Rights Movement and one of the main influences for those who would later become the Black Panthers, shifted the context of application of pathological notions from African Americans' justified anger to the racist (and therefore unjustified) hatred of an entire society: "[R]acism is a mass psychosis. […] A mass mental illness which is very much

[120] Soraya Chemaly, *Rage Becomes Her. The Power of Women's Anger*, Atria Books, New York 2019.
[121] Cf. Jonathan M. Metzl, *The Protest Psychosis*, pp. 122-128.

a part of the *American Way of Life*"[122]. Once a perspective of this kind was adopted, the potentially violent anger of racialized subjects appeared as a far from insane way to survive in a hostile environment. During the same years, Frantz Fanon showed that at the root of the criminal rage that afflicted quite a few Algerians during French colonisation was not a disorder of their minds, but the colonial context itself:

> Under a colonial regime, no crime is too petty for a loaf of bread or a wretched sheep. Under a colonial regime, man's relationship with the physical world and history is connected to food. […] For the colonized, living does not mean embodying a set of values, does not mean integrating oneself into the coherent, constructive development of a world. To live simply means not to die. To exist means staying alive […] Stealing dates, therefore, or allowing one's sheep to eat the neighbor's grass is not a disregard for property rights or breaking the law or disrespect. They are attempts at murder. […] The criminality of the Algerian, his impulsiveness, the savagery of his murders are not, therefore, the consequence of how his nervous system is organized or of specific character traits, but the direct result of the colonial situation[123].

With Fanon, a psychiatrist who was as heretical as he was talented, anti-racism began to re-appropriate - in an admittedly minoritarian but very sophisticated way - the medium of psychiatry: debunking and contrasting racist prejudices became an integral part of the good clinician's job, whereas the problem of racial oppression remained to be solved politically[124].

Going back to the specific case of schizophrenia, it is interesting to note that the importance and originality of Black thought in this area is still partially overlooked. Within the Western critical tradition, the distinction between "schizophrenia as a process" and "schizophrenics as clinical cases that need hospitalizing" is usually

[122] Robert F. Williams, *Negroes with Guns*, Marzani & Munsell, New York 1962, pp. 72-73.

[123] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* [1961], trans. by R. Philcox, Grove Press, New York 2004, pp. 232-233.

[124] Cf. Frantz Fanon, *Alienation and Freedom*, ed. by J. Khalfa and R.J.C. Young, Bloomsbury Academic, London 2018, part II. On Fanon's contribution to psychiatry see Nigel C. Gibson and Roberto Beneduce, *Frantz Fanon, Psychiatry and Politics*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham 2017. On the reasons behind Fanon's choice to quit his post as a psychiatrist and join the Algerian anti-colonial resistance see David Macey, *Frantz Fanon. A Biography*, Verso, London-New York 2012, pp. 215 ff.

attributed to Fèlix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze. According to them, capitalist society "produces schizos in the same way it produces Prell shampoo or Ford cars"[125], also keeping under constant surveillance those it cannot lock up in asylums. Schizophrenics in hospitals are "people who've tried to do something and failed, cracked up"; "revolutionaries", instead, are those who experience schizophrenia as a process[126], embodying it not as a psychiatric condition, but as a "limit" to capitalism itself[127]. Without denying the power of this reflection, it should be noted that two African American psychiatrists, William Grier and Price Cobbs, had developed a somewhat similar reading of the relationship between schizophrenia and racism in the United States a few years earlier. In their view, schizophrenia among Black people was not only a mental illness, but also a totally "healthy" way of adapting to a highly hostile environment: a certain level of "cultural paranoia" about white people's intentions could make the difference between life and death. There was therefore nothing senseless or accidental about Black rage[128]. As we will see in the next chapters, several anti-racist activists advanced arguments of this kind in the 1960s and 1970s.

Anger and Violence

While providing evidence of politically radical ways of conceiving and practising anger by oppressed groups, at times even overturning its pathologization, references to radical feminism, militant anti-racism and anti-colonialism also raise several questions. Perhaps the most predictable one concerns the issue of violence: would a politics that welcomes an angry response to structural injustice necessarily end up being violent?

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[125] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1972], trans. by R. Hurley, M. Seem and H.R. Lane, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1983, p. 245.
[126] Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Catherine Backès-Clément, *On Anti-Oedipus* [1972], in Deleuze, *Negotiations. 1970-1992*, trans. by M. Joughin, Columbia University Press, New York 1995, p. 23.
[127] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 245-246.
[128] William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *Black Rage* [1968], Basic Books, New York 1992.

Even before trying to sketch out an answer, one cannot fail to notice that the topic of violence is usually placed, within so-called liberal democracies, in a sort of ideological minefield. On the one hand, the advent and preservation of liberal democracy have historically required the use of considerable amounts of violence. On the other, such a regime tends to be considered as a point of no return, an institutional set-up that no longer relies on violence. Moreover, a liberal-democratic state clearly employs many forms of violence, both direct (the police and prison apparatus, the army) and indirect (e.g. in terms of failure to provide vital resources to certain sections of the population) - while mentioning violence at all appears to be admissible in the liberal-democratic public sphere only through a rhetoric of condemnation ("Violence is always wrong"). These contradictions are the result of the contemporary inability to think politics beyond the institutional and conceptual burden of the modern state[129]. It is no coincidence that the willingness to turn a blind eye to (even illegal) violence perpetrated by state officials[130] goes hand in hand with a high level of repression of social movements deemed to be too "radical"[131]. In order to put such a burden aside, I follow Étienne Balibar in observing how, from a historical point of view, the fights against structural injustice, whether they represented the emblem of violence (Leninism) or that of non-violence (Gandhism), have always had a conflictual and contradictory relationship with state legality[132]. Violating one or more state laws, from the perspective of this

[129] "To endeavour to think the state is to take the risk of taking over (or being taken over by) a thought of the state, that is, of applying to the state categories of thought produced and guaranteed by the state and hence to misrecognize its most profound truth" (Pierre Bourdieu, "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field", in Id., *Practical Reason. On the Theory of Action*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1998, p. 35). As Maurizio Viroli has famously shown, the very notion of *politics* in its modern usage (meaning an activity rather than a form of knowledge) can be traced back to the emergence of the concept of "reason of state" in the sixteenth century (see Viroli, "The Revolution in the Concept of Politics", in *Political Theory* 20(3), 1992, pp. 473-495).

[130] The most striking example is perhaps that of the all but obsolete recourse to torture - on which I refer for a general overview to Donatella Di Cesare, *Torture*, Polity, Cambridge 2018.

[131] E.g. Christian Davenport, Hank Johnston, Carol Mueller (eds.), *Repression and Mobilization*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2005; Jarret S. Lovell, *Crimes of Dissent. Civil Disobedience, Criminal Justice, and the Politics of Conscience*, New York University Press, New York 2009.

[132] Étienne Balibar, "Lenin and Gandhi. A missed encounter?", in *Radical Philosophy* 172, 2012, p. 11.

dissertation, is therefore neither necessary nor sufficient to constitute an instance of political violence[133].

Having thus established that violent action is not equivalent to illegal or anti-institutional conduct, the relationship between violence and anger needs to be investigated. In their latest book, Judith Butler exposes the misconception according to which non-violence should be accompanied by a "pacific or calm" disposition of mind: as the Gandhian campaigns of civil disobedience themselves indicate, "[nonviolence] is very often an expression of rage, indignation, and aggression"[134]. The use of physical force, Butler continues, should not be understood as synonymous with violence, since it can also refer, for example, to "modes of non-action, ways of becoming an obstacle, of using the solidity of the body and its proprioceptive object field to block or derail a further exercise of violence"[135]. On the other hand, Butler finds it difficult (and perhaps even counterproductive) to settle for a normative definition of violence itself, as any proposed formulation may be instrumental to specific political interests or institutions – it is indeed remarkable that, while writing a book on (non)violence, they assign no determinate meaning to such a concept. For my purposes here it suffices to say that I, along with Butler, take violence to include nonnegligible physical and/or psychological harm to one or more persons. While the latter are not necessary implications of radical anger, voicing one's anger cannot exclude the potential use of violent means: getting angry at being oppressed implies (re)claiming one's dignity - a dignity that may not allow one to peacefully accept what has been taken so far. Such a violence, however, is

[133] Even an openly revolutionary and violent political stance does not imply a "romanticism of illegality", as Lukács made clear a century ago. Indeed, both the romanticization of illegal action and the dull respect of legal norms (what he called "the cretinism of legality") betray an (ideological) belief in the insuperability of the capitalist state. Therefore – Lukács wrote – "The question of legality or illegality reduces itself for the Communist Party to a mere question of tactics, even to a question to be resolved on the spur of the moment, one for which it is scarcely possible to lay down general rules as decisions have to be taken on the basis of immediate expediencies. In this wholly unprincipled solution lies the only possible practical and principled rejection of the bourgeois legal system. […] For the proletariat can only be liberated from its dependence upon the life-form created by capitalism when it has learnt to act without these life-forms inwardly influencing its actions" (György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics* [1923], trans. by R. Livingstone, MIT Press, Cambridge 1999, p. 264).

[134] Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence. An Ethico-Political Bind*, Verso, New York 2020, Introduction.

[135] Ibid.

rarely uncontrolled[136]: those who have experienced violence at first hand are well aware of the difficulty of foreseeing and managing its consequences[137], especially in situations where disproportionate violence might convince new enemies to take the field or lead old adversaries to retaliate (possibilities to which I will return in a moment). This dynamic clearly emerges in the case of radical feminism, a movement which carried out a ruthless, furious critique of the patriarchal status quo and had a great social impact, but which on the whole made very little use of violent tactics[138].

Among the few exceptions, mainly defensive in character, was the learning of martial arts - which was rooted, after all, in the very history of the feminist movement. In fact, already at the beginning of the 20th century British suffragists had started practising ju-jitsu, which had then just been introduced in England. While the initial aim had been to equip themselves with a method of defence in private life, activists soon adapted the teachings they had learnt to defend themselves against police brutality[139]. Similarly, one of the members of Cell 16, Abby Rockefeller, taught her comrades Tae Kwon Do to defend themselves against sexual abuse. The reason for starting a self-defence course

[136] As Donna Haraway famously claimed, the subjugated are "least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge. They are knowledgeable of modes of denial through repression, forgetting, and disappearing acts" (Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", in *Feminist Studies* 14(3), 1988, p. 584). Although her remark is an epistemological one (and therefore no immediate political implication can be derived from it), it is also true that, as Chiara Bottici reminds us, anarchism, Marxism and the most radical strands of feminism (i.e. some of the main movements that oppressed groups have been animating in the last couple of centuries, and which have reclaimed the hermeneutic primacy that Haraway referred to) all share a notion of freedom as *freedom of equals*, in the light of which "no one can be free unless we are all equally so" (Chiara Bottici, *Imaginal Politics. Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary*, Columbia University Press, New York 2014, pp. 181ff.). This means that those movements could hardly recur to indiscriminate violence without violating their own principles – at least in situations short of a (civil) war. In this connection, it is telling that Alicia Garza, one of the founders of Black Lives Matter, has described the antiracist movement's view of freedom with words close to Bottici's: "Given the disproportionate impact state violence has on Black lives, we understand that when Black people in this country get free, the benefits will be wide reaching and transformative for society as a whole. When we are able to end hyper-criminalization and sexualization of Black people and end the poverty, control, and surveillance of Black people, every single person in this world has a better shot at getting and staying free. When Black people get free, everybody gets free" (Alicia Garza, *A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement*, in *The Feminist Wire*, 7/10/2014).

[137] Such an unpredictability was famously stressed by Hannah Arendt in her *On Violence*, Harcourt, New York 1970. Her occasional claims on emancipatory violence were, however, significantly undermined by racially-inflated biases – see Kathryn T. Gines, *Hannah Arendt and the Negro Question*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2014, chap. 6.

[138] Fahs, *Firebrand Feminism*, p. 42.

[139] Elsa Dorlin, *Se défendre. Une philosophie de la violence*, La Découverte, Paris 2017, p. 57. The suffragettes also recurred to violence *against things*, mainly in the forms of bombing and arson (see C.J. Bearman, "An Examination of Suffragette Violence", in *The English Historical Review* 120 (486), 2005, pp. 365-397).

was extremely mundane: one night several members of the group were approached by some men in a car, who started to verbally harass them. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz vehemently pointed out that their advances were completely unwanted, whereupon the driver leaned out of the car and tried to hit her with a jack - only to be hit by Rockefeller's Tae Kwon Do move, after which the assailant and his cronies fled[140].
What radical feminists found in the martial arts was not just a way of venting their anger outwardly rather than through self-harming behaviour, but also what we may call "a martial ethics of the self"[141], a technique that did not belong to a fully-formed, pre-existing subject, but which made it emerge through its own making - this being one of the meanings Foucault attributed to the term *subjectivation*[142]. Becoming a subject means beginning to understand one's own potency, what one's body is capable of - and the political and ethical responsibility coming with it. In this way anger, far from being left to flow casually, becomes part of an *askesis*, a "practice of the self on the self" that is meticulously regulated without subordinating the subject to an external law[143].

Can Anger Be Successfully Used by the Oppressed?

A sceptic might object at this point that such a reading of anger may well be poetic, but it is bound to remain ineffective. Is it not true that anger is politically acted out by the oppressors, much more than by the oppressed? And if one recognises this almost trivial fact, does not the anger of the oppressed only risk stimulating the usually stronger and

[140] Fahs, *Firebrand Feminism*, p. 39.
[141] Dorlin, *Se défendre*, p. 15. On the bodily dimension of such an ethics, see also Jaime Schultz, "More than Fun and Games: Cell 16, Female Liberation, and Physical Competence, or Why Sport Matters", in *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 36(17-18), 2019, pp. 1552-1573.
[142] In English, the French *subjectivation* is sometimes translated as "subjectivization", as in what is perhaps Foucault's clearest definition of the term: "I will call subjectivization the procedure by which one obtains the constitution of a subject, or more precisely, of a subjectivity" ("The Return of Morality" [1984], trans. by T. Levin and I. Lorenz, now in Michel Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture. Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, Routledge, New York 1988, p. 253). For a thorough analysis of Foucauldian subjectivation see Laura Cremonesi, Orazio Irrera, Daniele Lorenzini and Martina Tazzioli (eds.), *Foucault and the Making of Subjects*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham 2016.
[143] Cf. Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. *Lectures at the Collège de France (1981-1982)*, trans. by G. Burchell, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke 2005, pp. 315-317.

more destructive anger of those who oppress them? Indeed, the very notion of oppression seems to imply a certain asymmetry of forces that would bring us back to where we started in the Introduction: if there is a possibility for those who suffer a structural form of injustice to make their reasons clear to those benefitting from that injustice, it does not take place through anger, but by means of gentle argumentation. Getting angry – so the objection goes - may suit the powerful, but it will rarely play out into the hands of those at the bottom of the social pyramid.

To answer this criticism, let us first look at history: it is not the case that those who oppress others ever surrendered their privileges too willingly, and obtaining even very partial concessions has often required a strong recourse to popular anger – as Dr. King wrote: "freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed"[144]. The annals are full of protests, strikes, revolts and revolutions - not all of which failed, and which have often had a profound socio-cultural influence even when they were not politically successful[145]. It would be wrong, however, to dismiss the previous objection as a sheer reactionary cliché, because it reflects a common thought within liberal-democratic polities. The basic idea is that, within a representative regime that already guarantees a series of fundamental rights, focusing on the political use of anger would be an anachronistic move: it would frighten moderate sectors of public opinion; it would lead to the mobilisation of extremist factions; on the whole, it would weaken movements fighting against injustice by making them less palatable to the average voter. While we will return to these issues several times in the following chapters, I would like to immediately outline what I consider to be the most effective responses to this line of reasoning.

First of all, we can evaluate anger in terms of usefulness. Bearing in mind that in pluralistic societies a political agenda usually needs a broad support to be implemented,

[144] Martin Luther King Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, 16/4/1963, available at: https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html.

[145] In passing, it is also interesting to note that the purported greater effectiveness of more "respectable" and non-violent modes of struggle is not backed by the available evidence (see for example Alexei Anisin, "Debunking the Myths Behind Nonviolent Civil Resistance", in *Critical Sociology* 46(7-8), 2020, pp. 1121-1139).

would not manifestations of anger on the part of those demanding the overcoming of structural injustices end up making that overcoming more difficult to achieve? Obviously, it would be a mistake to completely ignore the teleological dimension of anger, i.e. whether or not it helps us to achieve certain goals. There may well be circumstances in which the balance of power is such that a rather submissive strategy is more functional than an openly antagonistic one. However, it is far from clear that scenarios of this latter kind are the norm.

In the context of recent feminist activism, for example, the movements committed to combating gender-based violence - from harassment to femicide - have focused most explicitly on portraying the women involved as (righteously) angry. A recent study carried out in seventy countries over a period of forty years has shown that the action of these movements was by far the most influential factor in the adoption of legislation and public policies against gender-based violence (thus being more relevant than factors such as the action of left-wing parties, the presence of women in government or the level of national wealth)[146]. Even openly violent outbursts of anger, such as the 1992 anti-racist riots in Los Angeles, significantly shifted local public opinion (both Black and white) towards positions closer to those of the demonstrators, with visible effects in typically institutional contexts such as elections, too[147]. In other words, the recourse to the ideological notion of the mad crowd which we have seen in Chapter 1 is not always going to be successful when it comes to angry activists.

Another way to criticize anger at structural injustice, which we may refer to as *the argument of "opposing extremes"*, has recently come back into fashion in two main versions. The first insinuates that, once a political discourse based on anger is set in motion, the positions of those who oppose structural injustice and those who would like to preserve it for as long as possible would become increasingly similar, united by a

[146] Mala Htun e S. Laurel Weldon, "The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective", 1975-2005, in *American Political Science Review* 106(3), 2012, pp. 548-569.

[147] Ryan D. Enos, Aaron R. Kaufman, Melissa L. Sands, "Can Violent Protest Change Local Policy Support? Evidence from the aftermath of the 1992 Los Angeles Riot", in *American Political Science Review* 113 (4), 2019, pp. 1012-1028.

growing intransigence that would be ill-suited to a democratic society[148]. Faced with the obvious retort that, between a woman expressing anger against patriarchy and an alt-right male activist who is angry because women purportedly dominate over men, only the former is angry at an empirically observable form of injustice (while the latter is either in bad faith or paranoid), those who espouse this version of the argument claim that, whatever the differences, both types of anger are driven by an unhealthy desire for revenge. Consider the following example, taken from Martha Nussbaum's recent book on anger:

> Let us simply stipulate that […] empirical analysis is correct: if the rich pay more taxes, this will indeed help the poor. […]. And let us grant, as well, what seems obvious: the rich will be upset and pained by such a change if it occurs. Now let us imagine two proponents of this change. P focuses on social welfare. Outraged by injustice, he wants to produce a more just society. He doesn't think that the likely suffering of the rich should stop us from doing what is right, but he doesn't want that suffering. Indeed, to the extent that it might create political resistance to his project, he would rather that there was no such suffering. Q, by contrast, wants the beneficial change, but she also likes the idea of the rich suffering, as a payback or comeuppance for their arrogance and greed. […] Unfortunately, real political actors, including voters, are rarely as pure as P[149].

Let us now place this sketch in its context, both theoretical (a book whose author argues that, with rare exceptions, the use of anger in politics is always problematic and counterproductive) and geographical, namely the United States, from which Nussbaum writes and to which most of the examples in her text refer. Let us then analyse her claims. The initial assumption seems certainly in line with what we know about the United States: a country with strong inequalities in terms of income and wealth, which have been increasing in recent decades to the benefit of a small minority; the US population enjoys public services which, in terms of both quality and quantity, are

[148] Rosenwein, *Anger*, p. 193.

[149] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness. Resentment, Generosity, Justice*, Oxford University Press, New York 2016, p. 37.

inferior to those to which the inhabitants of countries with comparable levels of wealth have access; these services have been shrinking in recent decades and are sometimes seen as a source of shame in US society (e.g. receiving benefits because one is poor can be considered a personal fault). In the light of this, Nussbaum's second assumption looks more questionable: it is certainly true from an empirical point of view, since one of the reasons for the low level of taxation of large assets and incomes in the United States is indeed the enormous political influence of the super-rich[150], but in a sense the fact that those with large incomes and assets would "be upset and pained" against the possibility of higher taxation is anything but "obvious". Indeed, it would require a strong sense of entitlement and an equally significant lack of concern for other people's needs. The wealthy, and especially the very wealthy, would know that by refusing to pay higher taxes they are condemning large sections of the population to severe deprivation (poor public health coverage, reduced access to higher education, few subsidies for the unemployed and disabled, etc.), but they would nevertheless opt to defend their wealth to the bitter end. In other words, if it is possible to speak here of "pain" at all, it would be of a kind we have strong political reasons to disregard.

Similarly, in her comparison between P and Q Nussbaum speaks of the possible "suffering" of rich people from an increase in their taxes. The source of this condition is unclear - nothing in what she writes can suggest that, after the said rise in taxation, they would not continue to be extremely privileged and at the top of the class hierarchy that characterises capitalist economies. The only plausible scenario is that Nussbaum is referring to a purely psychological suffering, coming from a very strong attachment to money. If this is the case, however, far from being "likely", rich people's "suffering" becomes, in her framework, as "obvious" as their initial lack of sympathy for taxation: the entire distinction between P and Q, between a "polite" anger and a more

[150] E.g. Martin Gilens, *Affluence and Influence. Economic Inequality and Political Power in America*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2012; Nicholas Carnes, *White-Collar Government. The Hidden Role of Class in Economic Policy Making*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2013; Larry M. Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2016.

"vindictive"[151] one wanting the rich to suffer, ends up having no practical implication at all. In fact, if the only way to implement a less unfair taxation is to make those who would finance it "suffer", we are left with an alternative between a) preventing the entitled discontent of a privileged minority and b) a significant increase in public services for a large part of the population. Whether or not P and Q would feel a sense of revenge against the super-rich by choosing this second scenario is completely irrelevant. It should also be noted that, even taking Nussbaum's version at face value, the "vindictive" Q does not in any way wish the rich to become poor - while her rejoicing at their diminished wealth cannot be clearly separated from her satisfaction at an increase in public services.

The problem with the "opposing extremes" narrative is this: those who support it, like Nussbaum, fail to accept that there may be something right (and even desirable) in the anger that longs for one's political opponents to be worse off. You cannot overcome patriarchy without stripping men of a whole series of privileges they enjoy in a patriarchal order, nor racism without preventing white citizens from taking advantage of the precarious conditions of non-white immigrant workers to pay them less. Will men and white exploiters feel upset or pained? Good sign: it means that their privileges are actually being removed. In other words, it is good to recognize from the outset that policies contrasting structural injustices will encounter what Nussbaum calls "political resistance". Instead of deluding ourselves that keeping a low profile will make it disappear, wouldn't it be wiser to prepare ourselves to get the better of our opponents?

The second - and more refined - version of the argument of the "opposing extremes", while admitting the existence of an unbridgeable difference between the anger of the

[151] Nussbaum's depiction of anger – in the light of which anger "involves, conceptually, a wish for things to go badly, somehow, for the offender, in a way that is envisaged, somehow, however vaguely, as a payback for the offense" (*Anger and Forgiveness*, p. 23) – is itself questionable. Thomas Dixon points out its reliance on an understanding of this feeling that was more common in antiquity than now (Dixon, "What is the History of Anger a History of?", p. 13). More importantly, it is significantly at odds with the existing psychological literature, as demonstrated at length by Laura Silva, "Anger and its desires", in *European Journal of Philosophy* 29(4), 2021, pp. 1115-1135. Generally speaking, Nussbaum's emphasis on revenge seems to come from her frequent reliance on Aristotle, according to whom anger was "a longing, accompanied by pain, for a real or apparent revenge for a real or apparent slight" (Aristotle, *The 'Art' of Rhetoric*, trans. by J.H. Freese, Harvard University Press, Harvard 1959, p. 173).

oppressed and that of the oppressors, argues that in a liberal-democratic regime a truly violent reaction of the latter would *only* become possible in the face of an aggressive and provocative approach on the part of the former. From this angle, we should renounce anger not because of the risk of becoming like those we want to fight, but out of prudence. For instance, we should not give white supremacists the opportunity to say that the Black activist who was beaten by the police for no apparent reason had it coming because she was insolent towards the officers. On the contrary, we need to be constantly respectful of the people we are fighting, playing the role of the respectable victim as much as possible[152]. There is an element of common sense in this reasoning, which it would be silly to deny: to rebel against the status quo will always be an uphill and difficult struggle, therefore unnecessarily multiplying the obstacles to overcome and the risks to be taken would be foolish. On the other hand, we need to be aware that what provokes reactionary impulses more is not the anger of those who demand equality, but the goals the latter manage to achieve, regardless of whether they are angry or not.

In this connection, Carol Anderson has defined *white rage* as that form of racism which opposes actual improvements in Black people's conditions in the United States. In most cases, it does not manifest itself in conspicuous ways, but operates through complex institutional dynamics ("courts, legislatures, various sectors of the bureaucracy") and is "far more effective and destructive" than overt terrorist tactics such as those of the Ku Klux Klan[153]. Anderson focuses her analysis on five manifestations of white rage: the

[152] In Michelle Smith's words, *respectability politics* evinces "a distinct worldview: marginalized classes will receive their share of political influence and social standing not because democratic values and law require it but because they demonstrate their compatibility with the 'mainstream' or non-marginalized class" ("Affect and Respectability Politics", in *Theory & Event* 17(3, Supplement), 2014). While this is by far the most frequent nuance that the phrase takes today, it is worth noticing that it was originally introduced to describe the politics of African American Baptist women at the beginning of the XX century: "The black Baptist women's opposition to the social structures and symbolic representations of white supremacy may be characterized by the concept of the 'politics of respectability.' […] While adherence to respectability enabled black women to counter racist images and structures, their discursive contestation was not directed solely at white Americans; the black Baptist women condemned what they perceived to be negative practices and attitudes among their own people. Their assimilationist leanings led to their insistence upon blacks' conformity to the dominant society's norms of manners and morals. Thus the discourse of respectability disclosed class and status differentiation." (Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church 1880-1920*, Harvard University Press, Harvard 1993, pp. 186-187).

[153] Carol Anderson, *White Rage. The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*, Bloomsbury, New York 2017, pp. 3-4.

laws and Supreme Court rulings that largely nullified the abolition of slavery at the end of the Civil War; the segregated housing with which Northern cities "welcomed" the Great Migration of millions of African Americans coming from the South; the resistance of individual states to the elimination of racial segregation in schools, declared unconstitutional at the federal level in 1954; the interminable obstruction of the full implementation of the Voting Rights Act, one of the greatest achievements of the Civil Rights Movement; the wave of resentment and conspiracy theories that accompanied the election(s) of the first Black president and the supremacist uprisings that brought to the subsequent presidency of Donald Trump.

The problem for the argument of the opposing extremes is that it would be difficult to claim that events such as the Great Migration or Obama's electoral victories took place in a climate of anger on the part of the racialized population. Anger may have been one of their many elements, but it certainly was not the main emotional overtone. The campaign for the desegregation of the education system, moreover, was conducted tenaciously by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People – but its actions were marked by extreme caution precisely because of fear of a backlash that in fact, despite all prudence, occurred. Anderson's rich historical overview shows that it does not matter how the advancement of African Americans' rights took place - it was the prospect of advancement itself that triggered reactionary hostility among white people.

This conclusion has recently been confirmed by an extensive study by political scientist Davin Phoenix, drawing on survey data from the late 1980s to 2018. Phoenix demonstrates the existence of a real "anger gap" among the non-white (especially African-American) population over the timeframe considered. Black people, despite often being the victims of caricatured representations that would have them angry and insanely aggressive[154], show feelings of anger about the political situation significantly

[154] On the "Angry Black Woman" stereotype see, among others: J. Celeste Walley-Jean, "Debunking the Myth of the 'Angry Black Woman': An Exploration of Anger in Young African American Women", in *Black Women, Gender & Families*

less frequently than white people do. This is reflected in a lower tendency towards political participation and higher risks for Black people who decide to mobilise in ways such as marches and demonstrations - further reducing the political influence of this already discriminated-against group[155]. These research findings are particularly striking because they reveal that, no matter how much an oppressed category of people may actually embrace the political use of anger, the dominant group may successfully portray them as threatening. But then - one is tempted to ask – wouldn't it be worth considering getting *actually* angry?

My reply to the second version of the opposing extremes argument needs to be distinguished, however, from the belief that even the smallest uses of anger are to be assessed solely on the basis of their effects for the members of the groups at stake (a racial minority or the colonized majority, the female population, the working class, etc.). While the main criterion of judgement should reasonably remain of such a teleological kind (ultimately a fundamental part of politics, and even more so of radical politics, is about achieving certain goals), I think it would be wrong to exclusively rely on it. Anger, after all, is a feeling, and as such contains an ineliminable component of spontaneity - it is a way of acting that follows an inner motion and cannot be fully encompassed within a calculating rationality. This does not mean, as we shall see more clearly in the following chapters, that it is irrational - but it implies the existence of (variable, yet always present) limits, beyond which one's state of mind can no longer be self-censored. Sometimes, the sense of injustice is simply too strong.

In this connection, Amia Srinivasan has shown how, especially in cases involving individuals experiencing structural forms of injustice, anger can be *appropriate* even without being *effective*. One of her best examples involves the reactionary commentator

3(2), 2009, pp. 68-86; Trina Jones, Kimberly Jade Norwood, "Aggressive Encounters & White Fragility: Deconstructing the Trope of the Angry Black Woman", in *Iowa Law Review* 102, 2017, pp. 2016-2069.

[155] Davin L. Phoenix, *The Anger Gap. How Race Shapes Emotion in Politics*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2020. Conversely, Antoine J. Banks has shown that in the US making white people angry - no matter the basis for their anger - makes racist ideas more salient to them (*Anger and Racial Politics. The Emotional Foundation of Racial Attitudes in America*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2016).

William Buckley - who, in the famous 1965 debate with the African-American writer James Baldwin at Cambridge University, suddenly said to his interlocutor something along the lines of: "It's ok to criticise racism, but do we really want to spend our whole lives rehashing the past? Isn't the American Dream the best opportunity Black people can hope for? Why should you become entrenched in an angry condemnation of US society, instead of looking practically to the future and taking advantage of the opportunities it offers? African Americans should avoid giving in to despair, avoid becoming entrenched in their anger - otherwise the only possible consequence would be confrontation, something akin to a Civil War" - a conflict, Buckley added, that he and the rest of white Americans would also have fought, "not only in the Cambridge Union...but on beaches and on hills and on mountains and on landing grounds"[156]. Buckley's not-so-implicitly threatening tone, Srinivasan observes, highlighted the fact that the call to refrain from anger to prevent even worse consequences for one's cause is often a form of victim-blaming, an accusation directed not at those who are responsible for an unjust state of affairs, but at the very people who had it imposed on them against their will. As long as those who call for abstention from radical anger do not show solidarity in the fight against the unjust social order which radical anger addresses, their reminder of the negative effects of this feeling must be viewed with suspicion[157].

Being intellectually dishonest, obviously, did not prevent Buckley from being partly right about the implications that an openly rebellious attitude on the part of the Black population might have had in the United States during the '60s. A diametrically opposite view, one that would have encouraged instead the racialized population's anger at racism as much as possible under all circumstances, would have been similarly problematic. Baldwin himself was well aware that, while being a minimally conscious Black individual in the United States meant being in an almost constant state of anger,

[156] The debate is available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Tek9h3a5wQ&ab_channel=AeonVideo .
[157] Amia Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger", in *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 26(2), 2018, pp. 124; 133.

his role as a public intellectual was to transcend the impulses of the moment and to provide a reference point for all those, Black and white, who wished to change the status quo. In this tension between an anger as relentless as it was appropriate, and the need to make it visible only when politically necessary, Srinivasan sees the particular *affective injustice* that African Americans faced (and in part still face) in the public sphere[158].

The Ballistics of Anger

Taking affective injustice into account will then require an evaluation of political anger that, while focusing on its effects, won't be limited to them. At the same time, the eruptive and dynamic character of much anger expressed by oppressed groups prevents us from attributing too much importance to anger's initial intentions. Be it consequentialist or deontological, a moral, normative reading of the uses anger would therefore be unsatisfactory.

By discussing some of the main ways in which scepticism about the use of anger in politics manifests itself, I have tried to show that none of them is convincing. However, in making the case against these objections, the complexity of the issue and the need to refer to case studies and a constantly evolving historical record to analyse the political effectiveness and appropriateness of anger also emerged. The provisional conclusion that I would draw from this is that, while there are no reasons to exclude the potential usefulness of anger in opposing structural forms of injustice, the need to recur to contextual evaluations does not allow us to support the opposite thesis either. Instead, it is necessary to consider in each case what options are available, the forces at one's disposal, the risks of action as well as those of inaction, the alliances at stake, the chances of success or of falling behind, and so on.

[158] Ibid., p. 135. More generally, she defines affective injustice as "the injustice of having to negotiate between one's apt emotional response to the injustice of one's situation and one's desire to better one's situation" (Ibid.). Srinivasan's account is reflected in the psychological literature on emotion regulation, as shown in Alfred Archer and Georgina Mills, "Anger, Affective Injustice, and Emotion Regulation", in *Philosophical Topics* 47(2), 2019, pp. 80-88.

A contextual reasoning of this kind points to the need for some heuristics allowing us to examine different scenarios coherently. It is to this end that I propose the notion of *ballistics of anger*. Ballistics, the discipline that studies the motion of projectiles and ammunition in general, deals by its very nature with explosive, blunt objects that are not easy to handle - just like anger. If a typical ballistic problem consists in establishing which weapon fired a given shot and what the person handling it was aiming at, we have seen that in the case of anger, too, its origin (are we dealing with subjects actually experiencing a structural condition of injustice, or not?) and its direction (what is anger aiming at, what are its targets and the effects that can be anticipated?) count. The ballistics expert may also be called upon to establish, especially in a military context, whether a certain type of weaponry has a good chance of prevailing over another in a firefight. In the same way, we should ask whether politically radical anger has a chance of facing possible reactionary responses, and what is the most promising way to express it. Ballistics, by reconstructing the trajectory of a specific bullet, also allows a more accurate distribution of responsibility (e.g. a deflection can show that the intention of the gunman was not to hit another human being) - and we have said that the effects of anger must certainly be considered, but also the possible affective injustice that contributes to them.

Finally, one cannot fail to notice that in public debates one hears about ballistics above all with reference to courtrooms: the various parties involved in a trial ask professionals to draw up ballistic reports and ascertain the dynamics of a given event. Such ballistic reports, however, most often take place *ex post* - a condition of possibility for carrying out an expert opinion with a high level of certainty is that there must be some weapons, ammunition or gunshot residues to be examined. In the absence of those elements, the expert's discourse will inevitably become speculative (let us imagine that she is asked, for example, about the abstract possibility of a marksman hitting a shot of a certain difficulty). Doesn't then the assertion that, in order to better understand the political uses of anger, one must develop a ballistic understanding of it imply a bias towards a

form anger that has already been put in motion, rather than a merely hypothetical one? The answer is yes, but to explain why that is the case it will be necessary to step outside the narrow space of ballistics as a branch of applied physics to investigate the relationship between anger and philosophy.

Chapter 3. The Art of Being a Dog

Anger and Philosophy

Paradoxical as it may seem, philosophy would at first glance appear to have more connections with ballistics than it does with anger. Indeed, anyone who has studied *ballistics* (*ballistica* in modern Latin) knows that this term was introduced in 1644 by the eponymous treatise of a French theologian, philosopher and mathematician, Father Marin Marsenne - who is remembered today mainly for his friendship and intellectual exchange with Descartes, one of the fathers of modern philosophical thought. The introduction to Marsenne's book was signed by a leading figure of European philosophy whom we have already encountered, Thomas Hobbes. Descartes himself before being a philosopher had been a soldier, as he briefly recalled in the *Discourse on Method*[159].
Hard as it is to believe that a man who was familiar with war could be a stranger to the material features of existence, Descartes is often described as an idealist and a defender of the notion that there is a clear dichotomy between mind and body, *res cogitans* and *res extensa* – an idea that neuroscientist Antonio Damasio went as far as calling "Descartes' error".[160] Even according to some scholars of his work, Descartes' rich and adventurous biography would not be of particular interest for the analysis of his philosophy, since it would simply constitute a series of events that, while slowing down his intellectual endeavours, never distracted him from his eminently theoretical

[159] "I was then in Germany, where the occasion of the wars which are not yet over there had called me; and as I was returning to the army from the coronation of the emperor, the onset of winter detained me in quarters where, finding no conversation to divert me and fortunately having no worries or passions to trouble me, I remained for an entire day shut up by myself in a stove-heated room, where I was completely free to converse with myself about my thoughts" (René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy* [1637-1641], trans. by Donald A. Cress, Hackett, Indianapolis 1998, pp. 6-7).

[160] Antonio R. Damasio*, Descartes' Error. Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, Avon Books, New York 1994, pp. 245-252. On Damasio's caricatural depiction of Descartes see Geir Kirkebøen, "Descartes' Embodied Psychology: Descartes' or Damasio's Error?", in *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences* 10(2), 2001, pp. 173-191. On the growing number of "embodied" readings of Descartes see Barnaby R. Hutchins, Christoffer Basse Eriksen, Charles T. Wolfe, "The Embodied Descartes: Contemporary Readings of *L'Homme*", in Delphine Antoine-Mahut, Stephen Gaukroger, *Descartes'* Treatise on Man *and its Reception*, Springer, New York 2016, pp. 287-304.

vocation. In short, in some cases the mind/body dualism has become an explicit interpretative criterion for Descartes' oeuvre itself[161]. In fact, reading this author's considerations on war and the escape he was forced to make after the defeat of his army and the killing of his commander reveals a person who was well aware of the integration of mind and body: it was receiving a blow in the latter that induced in him a rapid, highly reactive thought, capable of choosing the most promising path to safety[162]. From his remarks, however, something no less problematic emerges: whether or not he was a dualistic thinker, Descartes certainly had a hierarchical approach in the light of which the activity of reflection and reasoning always had to take precedence over bodily passions, making sense of their stimuli by ordering and limiting them[163]. In this connection, he was a perfect exponent of what Simon Critchley has polemically described as philosophy "as affect-regulation"[164]. In Descartes' own words: "There is no soul so weak that it cannot, being properly guided, acquire absolute power over its passions"[165].

From such a perspective, the interest of some important philosophers of the period in ballistics, although not disconnected from the numerous armed conflicts that went through it, is usually understood more as a curiosity than as a demonstration of any "combative" dimension of philosophy itself. Going a little further, the very placing of figures such as Descartes and Hobbes in their historical context can easily lead to the conclusion that it was precisely in response to the uncontrollable and often murderous passions of the time (think of the religious afflatus of the bloodiest wars of that age) that they embraced forms of rationalism aimed at elevating the immateriality of the intellect over the corporeality of feelings. Even when violence proved inevitable, it had to be met

[161] Harold J. Cook, *The Young Descartes. Nobility, Rumor, and War*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2018, p. 23.
[162] Cf. Ibid, p. 124.
[163] As Dixon recognizes, Descartes was a precursor of sorts of the 'modern' conception of emotions – he even used, at times, the word *émotions* to describe what at the time were mostly labeled *passions* (cf. Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions*, pp. 76-79). For this reason (as well as for the fact that he well represents a philosophical approach to feelings that arrives to our day), I believe it is not anachronistic to consider his view of anger.
[164] Simon Critchley, *Tragedy, the Greeks, and Us*, Profile Books, London 2020, p. 10.
[165] René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul* [1649], in Id., *The Passions of the Soul and Other Late Philosophical Writings*, trans. by M. Moriarty, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015, p. 217

with objectivity, taking a seat at the table of ballistic calculations rather than launching into rash actions.

Descartes' position on anger is not surprising, then. He defined it as the kind of aversion we feel towards those who have wronged us, or at least tried to do so. Although close to indignation (a similar feeling, but one that is triggered when the wrong does not affect us personally), anger is "incomparably more violent" because it mobilises our *amour propre* - and with it the urgency to make amends for the offence we have suffered.[166]. Faithful to his theory of passions[167], Descartes identified two types of anger: one immediate, arising from a certain sense of surprise at the negative treatment received, which has limited effects and can be quickly assuaged; the other, initially less conspicuous but gradually increasing in intensity, nourishes pride and feeds an ever more lasting and uncontrollable desire for revenge. Only the first type, according to him, can be looked upon with some favour: endowing us "with the vigour to repel an insult", it is at the same time able to avoid excesses by means of "nobility of soul", i.e. the awareness that the goods of which we may be deprived are of little import, compared to the supreme freedom not to let the conduct of others disrupt our existence[168].

There is a clear element of expediency in Descartes' examination of anger: in an age dominated by religious and political feelings that were often out of control, emphasising the need not to conceive of every single episode of disrespect as a matter of life and death was certainly appropriate. On the other hand, the subject of the described anger, especially of the variant presented in a more favourable light, seems to have an

[166] Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, p. 275.

[167] "Although Descartes considers most emotions to be dangerous, he identifies a purpose for them. Indeed, he believes that emotions are of much use in strengthening what is characteristic of human beings: the activity of the soul. Reason and will, as activities of the soul, allow a person to take up a definite position and inner constancy in relation to all exterior objects and representations - those same representations that would lead to dangerous emotions if the will consented to them. Rejecting such emotional representations is good for the soul in the long term. Thus emotions have a purpose as they create a right, strong and constant attitude in human beings that rejects these dangerous emotions. […] According to Descartes' doctrine as outlined above, it is conceivable that a person feeling anger has to imagine the potentially harmful consequences of excessive anger in order to realise that the only good activity of the soul is in this case to control oneself. And this activity consists in showing the right attitude towards a harmful or excessive emotion" (Michael Krewet, *Descartes' Notion of Anger: Aspects of a Possible History of its Premises*, in Karl Enenkel e Anita Traninger (edited by), *Discourses of Anger in the Early Modern Period*, Brill, Leiden 2015, pp. 153-154).

[168] Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, p. 277.

aristocratic quality - we are dealing with a person for whom being wronged was an annoying but occasional event, who could afford to overlook most offences with a shrug. How could an individual who constantly experienced oppression at her own expense exhaust her anger in an occasional loss of demeanour? And what about particularly traumatic manifestations of injustice, such as those threatening one's survival?

Descartes is not just one author among many here, but may well serve as an emblem of the - failed, or at least interrupted - relationship between anger and philosophy. There are not many modern philosophers who have devoted organic reflections to this feeling, and even fewer who have not contented themselves with condemning or minimising it. Even among the latter - Descartes is proof of this - anger is almost always analysed through the lens of individual moral conduct, without taking into account its more properly political implications[169].

The very idea of a political philosophy of anger seems unthinkable, with significant repercussions on the use of anger itself: if the most that can be aspired to is a (useful, but insufficient) heuristic approach to political anger along the lines of ballistics, those who may want to use it in the fight against injustice would plausibly face a legitimation deficit. A "ballistic" approach could lead us to make sense of the breaking of the flower pots described in the Introduction: that was a gesture made by members of a discriminated minority (the Senegalese community of Florence) following the killing of one of their members and the lack of institutional responsiveness. Perhaps the action itself did not produce politically relevant outcomes for the anti-racist cause, but it was

[169] A virtually unique exception is represented by Rousseau, on whom see Karen Pagani, *Man or Citizen. Anger, Forgiveness, and Authenticity in Rousseau*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park 2015. As Pagani makes clear at several points, an overall reading of Rousseau on anger requires the overcoming of several terminological and conceptual issues, among which: Rousseau often used the French word *colère* to define not only anger, but also indignation, hatred, complaint, or disdain; on the other hand, he sometimes employed the terms *mépris* (contempt), *dédain* (disdain) and *haine* (hate) to name experiences closer to the English "anger" than to their literal translation; during Rousseau's lifetime, notions such as *ressentiment* (resentment) were used differently than today (see for instance *Man or Citizen*, pp. 3-4; 189-190; 203, n. 10; 221, n. 15). This is the reason why, by completely sidestepping all such complexities, authors like Pankaj Mishra end up providing simplistic interpretations of Rousseau (see Mishra, *Age of Anger*). Descartes, on the other hand, only used *colère* in his book on passions (see René Descartes, *Les passions de l'âme*, edited by G. Rodis-Lewis, Vrin, Paris 1964, pp. 113ff).

certainly one of the understandable consequences of the affective injustice experienced by its authors, who were implicitly asked to continue being "model immigrants" even when "good manners" had led them to receive only indifference and bullets.

What the ballistics of anger could hardly have justified is a hypothetical further step: an invitation to the entire population, both Senegalese and non, Black and white, to express their anger in a confrontational way at the subsequent failure of the authorities to counteract structural injustice along racial lines. Racism and other forms of structural injustice rely, in fact, on emotional economies of gain and loss, which are built around the ignition of opposing feelings in different social groups: what makes the members of a racialized minority angry usually encourages significantly different (if not opposite) affective responses in the privileged majority[170]. Almost a century ago, W.E.B. Du Bois spoke in this connection of a *public and psychological wage* of whiteness:

> It must be remembered that [during the Black Reconstruction] the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks, and the courts, dependent upon their votes, treated them with such leniency as to encourage lawlessness. Their vote selected public officials, and while this had small effect upon the economic situation, it had great effect upon their personal treatment and the deference shown them. […] On the other hand, in the same way, the Negro was subject to public insult; was afraid of mobs;

[170] See, among others, Paula Ioanide, *The Emotional Politics of Racism. How Feelings Trump Facts in an Era of Colorblindness*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2015, esp. pp. 1-23. Ioanide (Ibid., p. 2) defines the notion of emotional economies as follows: "emotions function much like economies; they have mechanisms of circulation, accumulation, expression, and exchange that give them social currency, cultural legibility, and political power. How, for example, might we measure the emotional and psychological impact of losing white cultural dominance in a town where the Latino/a immigrant population suddenly rises? What price might be placed on the emotional high of feeling morally superior to "Arab terrorists"? […] We may not be able to compute such emotional rewards and losses in the same ways that we are able to calculate the monetary advantages and disadvantages produced by racially and sexually discriminatory systems. Even so, socially shared emotions about race and sexuality have recognizable histories of circulation and expression". We may say that the *emotional communities* theorized by Barbara Rosenwein (see the Introduction above) provide the different and partially overlapping spheres in which emotions circulate, are exchanged and capitalized – i.e. where Ioanide's emotional economies emerge.

was liable to the jibes of children and the unreasoning fears of white women; and was compelled almost continuously to submit to various badges of inferiority[171].

It is easy to imagine that, in the context described by Du Bois, African-Americans felt at the very least frustrated by the fact of being virtually cut off from public life and welfare. However, that very condition was willingly reproduced by the white ruling class as an element of social distinction between white and Black workers: the former, while severely exploited, could rejoice in comparing their full status as citizens with the pariah-like condition of the latter[172]. While many things have changed since that time, Paula Ioanide has recently made the case for the persistence (both conscious and unconscious) of racist emotional economies in contemporary United States - in particular, she has focused on public feelings of "criminality", "terrorism", "welfare dependence" and "immigration"[173]. Considerations of this kind explain why anger at structural injustice is often met by the indifference, if not the hostility, of large sectors of the public opinion[174]. However, precisely because radical anger rages against the status quo, it cannot merely rely on the strength of small, radical groups; it also needs to counter dominant discourses about which forms of politics are legitimate and worthy of adherence by large sectors of the citizenry[175]. This implies the contrast of existent emotional economies and an explicit defence of the reasons behind radical anger. In other words, what is needed is a theory of political anger, a conception explaining

[171] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1935, pp. 700-701.

[172] David Roediger developed Du Bois's seminal intuition in his classical study of US white working class (*The Wages of Whiteness. Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, Verso, New York 2007, 2nd edition).

[173] Ioanide, *The Emotional Politics of Racism*.

[174] As Sara Ahmed reminds us, "challenging social norms involves having a different affective relation to those norms, partly by 'feeling' their costs as a collective loss" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh University Press, 2004, p. 196).

[175] This does not imply a (misleading) equivalence between the anger of the oppressed and that of their non-oppressed allies. As Myisha Cherry aptly wrote in the context of anti-racist rage: "An ally, in thinking that he feels as the oppressed also feels, not only commits a metaphysical mistake but a moral one. He minimizes people's experiences of injustice and reduces them to an emotion. […] Just because a person is outraged it does not mean that they now have the phenomenology or face the discomforting and disheartening reality of racially oppressed people" (*The Case for Rage*, p. 123). At the same time, there is no reason to deny that radical anger can be felt and acted upon by subjects who not directly experience the downsides of the structural injustice they are angry about. In chapter 7, I will briefly return to this point while analysing the feminist strike.

convincingly and comprehensibly why the political use of a certain kind of anger would be *right* or even *true*. Such a theory, however, should not rely exclusively on logical arguments and empirical facts: as Ioanide's research demonstrates, the feelings reinforcing structural injustice show a significant level of resistance to contrary evidence[176]. Our theory must therefore be both convincing and emotionally moving, encompassing discursive and non-discursive elements. What we are looking for is, in my view, a *political philosophy of anger*.

The Cynical Legacy: Philosophy as an Angry Enterprise

A statement such as the above may at first glance sound perplexing: what difference does it make to the people who smash flower pots whether some intellectual has formulated, in a more or less remote text, an abstract defence of a protest such as theirs? Talking about a political philosophy of anger is in a way reminiscent of the technicalities of academic discourse, of disputes between scholars who delude themselves into thinking they exert an influence on reality that they do not actually have. In spite of the first term in its name, *political* philosophy today presents itself mainly as a specialist form of knowledge, an academic discipline too often incapable of confronting the challenges of the present[177], without any clear link with praxis[178]. Yet philosophy has not always taken this form, and there was a time when it was possible for it to explicitly embrace anger and make a disruptive, public use of it.

The great mystification of a textbook-like approach to philosophical knowledge lies in reducing it to sheer discourse, to an inert catalogue of concepts. In fact, as Pierre Hadot argued in a milestone study, ancient philosophy – whose descendants contemporary

[176] Ioanide, *The Emotional Politics of Racism*, pp. 10, 16, 37-38, 105, 121-122, 137-138, 154-163, 180-181, 212-214, 216.
[177] Cf. Franco Palazzi, *Tempo presente. Per una filosofia politica dell'attualità*, ombre corte, Verona 2019, pp. 7-25.
[178] On the crisis of much contemporary political philosophy see Lorna Finlayson, *The Political Is Political. Conformity and the Illusion of Dissent in Contemporary Political Philosophy*, Rowman & Littlefield, London 2015 and Maeve McKeown, "The View from Below: How the Neoliberal Academy Is Shaping Contemporary Political Theory", in *Society* 59, 2022, pp. 99-109.

thinkers sometimes claim to be - was something radically different: in it, philosophical *discourse* was born out of a *life choice*. Such a trait can be found, their sometimes-bitter contrasts notwithstanding, in all the philosophical schools of antiquity. We often think that the distinguishing mark of a philosophical current lies in its fidelity to the ideas of the founder(s), while in fact its particular way of life was the main reason its followers chose it over others[179]. Even the Academy of Plato – who has often been portrayed as a thinker with authoritarian traits, determined to assert the primacy of his own philosophy in the government of the city[180] - was not based on a specific orthodoxy, a circumstance confirmed by the presence within it of positions even far removed from Plato's. In this kind of philosophy, understood as a collective search for wisdom and authentic life, there was a paradoxical "primacy of practical reason with regard to theoretical reason": it was life itself that dictated the agenda and the style of thinking. With the advent of Medieval Christianity, the link between life and thought was loosened to the point of almost disappearing, while a type of philosopher distinguished by teaching inside a strictly regulated institutional framework (monasteries, the first universities, etc.) became the norm. Although it ceased to be the dominant model, the ancient practice of philosophy would continue to re-emerge from time to time, often with polemical overtones, in Western culture - influencing, according to Hadot, even first-rate authors, from Descartes himself to Merleau-Ponty[181].

There is, however, one component of ancient philosophy that has been hardly ever taken up and which has only recently - from the 1980s onwards - been explicitly re-evaluated by a small but influential group of intellectuals. I am referring to Cynicism. We know that in ancient Greece it was wolves and dogs that were associated more than any other creature with anger-as-a-pathology (*rabies*), and the Cynics took their name from the

[179] Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* [1995], trans. by Michael Chase, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Ma) 2002, pp. 258-261; 3; 55; 98.

[180] See e.g. Hannah Arendt's famous criticism in *The Human Condition* [1958], University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1998, p. 222ff.

[181] Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 64; 56-57; 269; 253-258; 261-270.

word *kuon*, dog[182]. The connection is no less close with the dimension, not yet clearly distinguished from the previous one at the time, of anger-as-a-feeling[183]: Cynical life was, according to Michel Foucault's powerful interpretation of the Cynical legacy, "a life which barks, […] a life which can fight, which barks at enemies, which knows how to distinguish the good from the bad, the true from the false"[184].

With Cynicism, the ideal of philosophical life underwent a radicalisation: the presence of a philosophical school located in a given place was eliminated (students were accepted by wandering individual teachers on a case-by-case basis), the theoretical dimension almost completely disappeared in its traditional forms, while the biographical component took on an unprecedented relevance.[185] Existence was transformed into an *alethurgy*, a direct manifestation of truth[186]. Such an approach did not coincide with the absence of thought, but with a partial theatricalization of it: it is said that once Diogenes of Sinope, founder of the Cynical school, went to Plato - who had just defined the human being as a "bipedal animal without feathers" – bringing with him a plucked chicken, declaring: "That is Plato's human"[187]. This anecdote gives us a sense of the Cynics' ability to speak *both* to logical reasoning and to feelings: Diogenes' point was that Plato's definition happened to be logically flawed – so wide as to include a plucked chicken not less than a philosopher. His disruptive gesture, on the other hand, made a specific logical argument immediately understandable to anybody – all while making it also funny, entertaining. If the emotional economy of that time might have seemed to show deference to intellectually gifted individuals like Plato, with his objection (both

[182] Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* [1983], trans. by Michael Eldred, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis 1987, p. 104.

[183] Remember my disclaimer in the Introduction: here I am projecting a contemporary representation of "anger" on the Cynics' deeds, rather than claiming that they matched some rough, ancient equivalent of "anger".

[184] Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth (The Government of Self and Others II). Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, trans. by Graham Burchell, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke 2011, p. 243. On the appropriateness of Foucault's work as a reliable source on the ancient Cynics see Daniele Lorenzini, "Foucault, il cinismo e la 'vera vita'", in Lorenzo Bernini (ed.), *Michel Foucault, gli antichi e I moderni*, ETS, Pisa 2011, pp. 75-99.

[185] Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 101-102.

[186] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, p. 172.

[187] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, p. 103.

logical and theatrical) Diogenes managed to demonstrate not only that also extremely intelligent individuals can be wrong, but that they can be so as spectacularly as anybody else – thus suggesting that there is no reason to treat them differently. The little material on Cynicism which has survived to this day takes the form of anecdotes such as this, and testifies to the critical and provocative nature of the Cynics, whose way of life was spectacularly opposed "not only to the life of nonphilosophers, but even to the lives of other philosophers"[188].

Cynics mocked the arbitrariness of social norms by urinating, defecating and having sex in the public square, as well as by being impudent towards the powerful. In this connection, there is a famous story about the alleged encounter between Diogenes and Alexander the Great, in which Alexander found the philosopher sunbathing and offered to grant him any wish he had. The Macedonian ruler was told that Diogenes' greatest wish was that the king would stop standing between him and the sun's rays[189].

Such a tendency to question every common-sense belief and the brilliant refutation of the most deeply rooted convictions of one's fellows had already been practised by the Sophists, but with a completely different meaning. The Sophists were masters of rhetoric who taught the art of persuasion for the highest bidder - usually wealthy politicians - and for whom defending one claim or the opposite made no difference: what mattered was the successful practice of argumentation itself, and the power that came with it. Cynical criticism, on the other hand, only made sense if it was taken personally, if it showed enough fidelity to the truth to override any individual interest. The Cynics refused any payment for their teaching, addressed people from all walks of life impartially and practised extreme poverty. While Socrates was known for his indifference towards material goods, for the Cynics he had still "a house, a wife, children, and even slippers". Diogenes, on the other hand, was characterized by an

[188] Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 108.

[189] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, pp. 160-162. Simona Forti's beautiful re-reading of Cynicism culminates precisely in a re-telling of this anecdote (see her *New Demons. Rethinking Power and Evil Today*, trans. by Zakiya Hanafi, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2015 (2012), pp. 319-322).

active poverty, deliberately sought after and always unsatisfied with itself, striving to reach new limits[190]. He was an ascetic not in the self-mortifying sense of the word, but in that which refers more generally to a work of the self upon the self: he renounced only what he perceived as a limitation of his autonomy – "If he could have been well-off without sacrificing his freedom, he would not have objected at all"[191].

The Cynic led a tramp's existence, made up of wandering and begging, free from irrational ties of loyalty to a land of origin: it seems that Diogenes was the first to call himself a "citizen of the world" (*κοσμοπολίτης*)[192]. It was not known where a Cynic was headed to or where he came from, he was a stray dog, bringing his own granitic life example where it was most needed - his message being that the happiest existence is the one perfectly in control of itself. He courageously attacked the obtuseness, the hypocrisies, the desire to dominate others that obstruct the path towards a good life and are the cause of every injustice[193]. A self-appointed "doctor of society", he tried to save those who lived in accordance with meaningless social customs, condemned to a futile and unsatisfactory existence. Perhaps more than anything else, the Cynic was a political "animal" in a literal, materialistic sense of the term - that of someone who knew all he needed to achieve happiness was living "according to nature". It was a relentless yet profoundly rational anger that made him capable of all of this:

> [The] Cynical mission takes the form of a battle. It has a polemical, bellicose character. The medications offered by the Cynics are harsh. We can say that the Cynic is a sort of benefactor, but he is essentially […] an aggressive benefactor whose main instrument is the famous diatribe. […] the Cynic gets up in the assembly and he speaks out and attacks. He attacks his enemies, that is to say, he attacks the vices afflicting men, affecting those he is speaking to in particular, but also humankind in general. […] He is useful because he battles, because he bites[194].

[190] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, p. 258.
[191] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, p. 158.
[192] Ibid., p. 162.
[193] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, pp. 278-279.
[194] Ibid., p. 279. The Cynical diatribe "is moral dramaturgy intended to assault sensibilities, to turn thought upside-down, to turn social mores inside-out, to commit in language the very same barbarisms one condemns in society" (Theodore O.

Cynical anger was never on the side of oppression or privilege. It proceeded from the bottom up[195], taking its power precisely from the dirty, poor, half-naked individuals that the Cynics were: no one could have believed that people found their teachings persuasive because of the elegance or prestige of their proponents. Refusing in advance any reward or prize, the Cynics programmatically positioned themselves on the side of the losers, the fools, those who literally took a beating: it was not unusual, given the iconoclasm of their habits, for them to be beaten up. The act of speaking frankly even at the cost of suffering disadvantageous consequences (*parrhesia*), typical of Ancient Greek philosophy, reached with them the highest peaks of courage: they put their own survival at stake "not just by telling the truth, and in order to tell it, but by the very way in which [they lived]. In both meanings of the word, [the Cynic] 'exposes' [his] life. That is to say, [he] displays it and risks it. One risks it by displaying it; and it is because one displays it that one risks it"[196]. The *courage of truth* and the courage of anger here become one: Cynical truth could only be spoken angrily, "barking" - and the fact that it came from someone who barked, who lived it on his own skin, contributed to make its truthfulness evident.

A 'Barking' Philosophy for Our Time

In spite of what may appear to be a certain theoretical dryness, the philosophical practice of Cynicism offers numerous insights for the elaboration of a political philosophy of

Windt, "The diatribe: Last resort for protest", in *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 58(1), 1972, pp. 7-8). The Cynics employed it as "a specific tactic that intervenes in the real speech situations of everyday life. […] In rhetorical terms, diatribe employs 'abrupt and pungent' diction, as well as dramatic expressions of puzzlement. Its success at directing attention to the speaker and her message comes from its 'habit of indignation'. Diatribe is tactical because it works by surprise and spontaneity. […] It works to reveal the 'logic of emotion', making use not of formal rules of composition but a repertoire of disruptive tactics. Ultimately, *ethos* is its driving force, relying almost entirely on the rhetorical space available and authorized through sincere indignation and outrage on a moral question" (Kristen Kennedy, "Cynic Rhetoric: The Ethics and Tactics of Resistance", in *Rhetoric Review* 18(1), 1999, pp. 37-39).

[195] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, pp. 103-104.

[196] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, p. 234.

anger. Fundamental, first of all, is the idea of the union of theory and practice, of discourse and life. We have to keep in mind that, of the accounts of the Cynical school available to us, none was written by figures who were part of it - they always come from outside observers, in some cases quite distant in time. It is telling, then, that these outsiders, often belonging to philosophical currents other than Cynicism, recognised (on both theoretical and practical levels) the coherence and honesty of the Cynical philosophical enterprise. One might have judged it absurd or irritating, but certainly not false or insincere. After all, how could one have endured the Cynical philosopher's barking existence without a solid conviction of its meaningfulness? Translating this principle of consistency into today's politics, we can derive the importance of a struggle against particular forms of structural injustice that is both conscious and respectful of other structural modes of injustice, as well as of the mutual interconnections and possibilities for alliance that arise from them. The Cynics, in their vitalistic impulse, subjected every single aspect of human experience to critical scrutiny, without exclusion: the "vices" they opposed included "customs, ways of doing things, laws, political organizations, or social conventions."[197].

The recent history of social movements, from anti-racism to feminism, similarly shows that a fight against race and gender injustice that does not include, for example, class injustice, is fated to produce relevant effects for a small minority at best[198]. The Cynics' inflexible coherence also calls for compliance with the same egalitarian principles at all levels of action. A group fighting for more democratic and inclusive institutions would do well not to have an authoritarian leadership within it, just as it should not reproduce the power asymmetries it rightly criticises in a certain sphere (say gender) along other arbitrary axes of social differentiation (e.g. age).

[197] Ibid., p. 280.

[198] See, for example: Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism. From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*, Verso, New York 2013, part 3; Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, Haymarket, Chicago 2016. Obviously, the reverse is also true: there can be no effective class struggle that does not incorporate feminist and anti-racist demands.

Consistency and interconnectedness of struggles also have a direct effect on the issues of legitimation and effectiveness. A political mobilisation that coherently adheres to certain principles of equality and justice poses a more serious challenge to the established order than one that is ambiguous about its objectives and the management of its influence on society. Similarly, adopting an approach of openness and collaboration with movements that oppose different but related forms of injustice will provide a good number of allies in the face of repressive or otherwise de-legitimising institutional initiatives. Such a reflection discourages the adoption of cheap compromises or co-optation tactics, and fosters ambitious and far-reaching strategies.

Another dimension of the Cynical legacy that should be borne in mind is the possibility of reconciling anger with a mood that is not constantly mournful or frustrated. The Cynics' irreverence often betrayed a non-domesticated use of irony, a predisposition to mock their adversaries. In his famous preface to the English translation of the *Anti-Oedipus*, Foucault advised people to beware of "the sad militants, the terrorists of theory, those who would preserve the pure order of politics and political discourse. Bureaucrats of the revolution and civil servants of Truth". Against such an aseptic conception of activism, he felt the need to admonish his readers: "Do not think that one has to be sad in order to be militant, even though the thing one is fighting is abominable. It is the connection of desire to reality […] that possesses revolutionary force"[199]. This exhortation should not be mistaken for a particularly insidious form of affective injustice, which would place a sort of duty of lightness and good spiritedness on those who mobilise to fight their oppression. One of the aims of the *Anti-Oedipus*, as Foucault grasped perfectly, was precisely to put an end to the moralistic dimension of duty, which in the long run can only lead to despair. How could one ever feel joy because one has to do it? On the contrary, the Foucauldian admonition should be referred to the non-inhibition of the positive energy that can be released in and through collective anger.

[199] Michel Foucault, *Preface* [1977] in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. xii-xiv.

The only duty, in this sense, is not to give in to a sense of duty, as Silvia Federici effectively explains:

> There is a difference between suffering because something we have decided to do has painful consequences – such as facing repression, seeing people we care about suffer – and self-sacrifice, which is doing something against one's will and desire, just because we think it is our duty. This makes people unhappy and dissatisfied. Political work, on the other hand, must be healing. It must give us strength and vision, tighten our sense of solidarity, and make us realise our interdependence. To be able to politicise our pain, to turn it into a source of knowledge, into something that connects us to other people - all of this has healing power.[200].

We have seen before that constructively voicing anger can result in a form of physical relief, or even better health. Difficult as it may be for us to understand, the Cynical form of life goes in the same direction, that of a liberation from all the endless trappings and petty obligations that society imposes on its members (or most of them). By severing the strings of moralism, anger can then act as a catalyst for joy, playing both a curative and a caring role: curing ourselves from what we have called *the etiquette of oppression*, it also prompts us to better care for others.

The Cynical model is clearly not immediately replicable, nor does it lack problematic features - in this connection, its lesson can also be a negative one, indicating what mistakes a political philosophy of anger should not run into. The most dangerous of those has to do with the anthropological model implied by the figure of the Cynic: there is, on closer inspection, something highly arbitrary in its emphasis on autonomy, which in figures such as Diogenes seems to take on almost individualistic overtones. Enemy of all injustice, the Cynical thinker aspires to make himself immune to it not only by fighting injustice head-on and shunning any temptation to occupy a position of privilege himself, but also by going so far as to deny that anything can actually oppress him, once

[200] Silvia Federici, "Sulla militanza gioiosa", in *Machina*, 7/9/2020. On burnout in social justice activism and its relationship with a "culture of martyrdom" see Cher Weixia Chen, Paul C. Gorski, "Burnout in Social Justice and Human Rights Activists: Symptoms, Causes and Implications", in *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 7(3), 2015, pp. 366-390.

he has claimed his freedom in all its breadth. We have seen how such an echo reached, after many reversals, also a thinker like Descartes.

The idea that the highest form of life to which one can aspire is that of an abject yet sovereign subject, supremely in control of herself at all times, conceals a potential deception: no human being can survive without others taking care of her. This is true for childhood[201], old age and illness, but also in a more general sense. The Cynic was able to endure the dehumanising violence to which he was sometimes subjected because the suspicion that he was less than human did not touch him for a moment. He was a 'dog' not because he was subhuman, but because he embodied a way of being a political animal that too many people had forgotten. In so doing, he certainly benefited from his masculine identity, from a condition of non-slavery, from the education he had received - i.e. from features not always shared by members of oppressed categories. His certainty of seeing something that most of his peers were unable to discern also made the Cynic in a sense super-human (with the consequent risk of seeking a transcendent foothold for a philosophy that was as immanent as it could get). On the contrary, the lesson that we must draw today from a wide range of disciplines - from phenomenology to feminism, passing through psychoanalysis - is the constitutive non-self-sufficiency of the subject, its being constantly "done and undone" in her relationship with the other[202].

Anger is, after all, an empirical demonstration of this: I get angry at another individual, or a group of individuals, because their actions and words are not indifferent to me, but intervene with (sometimes lethal) force on the lives of others, including my own. The very change in the world that the political use of anger aims at could not take place if it were not already, at the same time, a change in human beings: as Deleuze and Parnet argued, even more important than the question of the "future of the revolution" is that

[201] As Chiara Bottici reminds us, while we can die alone, we are never born alone (*Rethinking the Biopolitical Turn. From the Thanatopolitical to the Geneapolitical Paradigm*, in "Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal" 36(1), 2015, pp. 175-197).
[202] See e.g. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, Routledge, New York 2004, especially Introduction and chap. 1.

concerning the "revolutionary-becoming of people"[203] (a point we will come back to in following chapters).

The Truth of Radical Anger

We mentioned earlier the Cynics' radical recourse to parrhesia, the fearless speech of ancient philosophers. The link between parrhesia and truth, however, was not limited to saying what one thought, but touched on a further dimension: the Cynic did not stop at stating his opinion, but asserted its truthfulness in a strong sense - his life was *true* life, its most exemplary form. Even if we separate it from the corresponding, anachronistic political anthropology, then, it seems that Cynical anger involved a high level of intransigence: on the essence of their teaching, the Cynics believed they could not be wrong. What then of the anger directed against injustice? What is the truth-claim it makes? Is there a way which, without resorting to metaphysical shortcuts or dogmatic dead ends, can lead us to claim, for example, that anti-racist anger is *true* and racist anger *false*?[204]

The question here involves something deeper that what was already implicated by the definition of anger at *structural injustice* presented in the Introduction. As the reader will recall, for Young a judgment of structural injustice needed, from a normative point of view, no more than the acceptance of a quite minimal principle of equal opportunities: "it is unfair to some individuals to have an easy time flourishing and realizing their goals, while others are hampered in doing so, due to circumstances beyond their control"[205]. Then, there were what we may call a factual criterion (the inequality in opportunities has to be proven empirically), a time constraint (inequality needs to be

[203] Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II. Revised edition* [1977], trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Columbia University Press, New York 2007, p. 147. In the filmed interviews composing the – never transcribed – *Abécédaire*, Deleuze was even more radical: all revolutions fail from an historical point of view, but what matters is that people have initiated a revolutionary-becoming (*devenir révolutionnaire*) in the meantime. See the "G comme Gauche" interview from minute 2:50: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2r-HjICFJM&list=PLiR8NqajHNPbaX2rBoA2z6IPGpU0IPlS2&index=8&ab_channel=SUB-TILproductions

[204] In what follows, I will take anti-racist anger as an example of anger at structural injustice.

[205] Young, "Equality of Whom?", pp. 15-16.

more than just episodic – it has to constitute one or more *patterns*) and a genealogical restriction (the presence of a "plausible story" explaining those patterns). When structural injustice does take place, what usually happens is that those advantaged by it attack or deny one or more of the features just mentioned (principle of equal opportunities, factual criterion, time constraint, genealogical restriction). An unsophisticated racist, for instance, may be willing to deny that one should not experience significant disparities in opportunities to flourish due to circumstances beyond her control. They may argue that (whatever the meaning of those expressions) 'Arabic culture' is inferior to 'European culture' and therefore that Arab immigrants in Europe should have diminished opportunities vis-à-vis native citizens, despite their Arab identity being not their fault. A slightly more sophisticated supporter of structural injustice could try to affirm that, when it comes to gender, the factual criterion does not hold (that it is not true that in our society women enjoy less opportunities than men). Similarly, a covert homophobe might attack the time constraint declaring that, although gays and lesbians were discriminated in the recent past, nowadays they surely are not. Finally, a self-made billionaire may contest that the genealogical restriction applies to class injustice in their case: they have earned their fortune from scratch, hence any attempt to make them pay a redistributive tax would be a theft.

In all these cases, proving the presence of an actual injustice against the objections just sketched would entail demonstrating that the four criteria mentioned above do hold after all (e.g. that 'Arabic culture' is not worse than 'European culture'; that the available data show many instances of gender discrimination against women; that homosexual individuals are far from having reached heterosexuals' level of opportunities; that the very possibility of becoming a billionaire in a context where other people are trapped into poverty is itself the demonstration that a story about class injustice can be told). It is perhaps unlikely that one would make many people change their minds with rejoinders of this sort, but they are exactly what it would be reasonable to expect in a conversation about justice. All of this would be necessary to prove the presence of

structural injustice – but it would still say nothing about anger as a just response. One could agree that, say, racism satisfies all of Young's criteria, while denying at the same time that anti-racist anger would be an appropriate reaction. Therefore, in order to remain on the terrain of justice, we should introduce a new set of criteria to show that radical anger would meet them and hence be just – the kind of potentially endless and likely useless exercise in which some academic philosophers excel. What they miss, however, is that the most difficult part is not getting people to abstractly agree on some universal normative principle of structural injustice or justified anger, but convincing them to admit that a particular, real-world situation contradicts such a principle.

In Kantian terms, the issue lies in the application of a *determining judgement*, i.e. the operation through which we subsume a particular under a universal rule that we already know[206]. Without this operation, moving from theory to practice would be impossible[207]. Kant himself affirmed that the lack of the power of judgment "is properly called stupidity", because no amount of study of universal principles and rules could compensate for the inability to apply them when needed[208]. We may add that, when it comes to the application of a certain definition or criterion of justice, Kant's "stupidity" can easily turn out to be also a form of ideology, in both a *functional* and an *epistemic*

[206] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* [1790], trans. by James Creed Meredith and Nicholas Walker, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008, p. 15.

[207] "However complete the theory may be, it is obvious that between theory and practice there must be a link, a connection and transition from one to the other. To the intellectual concept that contains the rule, an act of judgment must be added whereby the practitioner distinguishes whether or not something is an instance of the rule. And since we cannot always lay down rules for our judgment to observe in subsumption (as this would go on ad infinitum), there may be theoreticians who, for lack of judgment, can never be practical: physicians or jurists, for example, who have been well schooled but do not know what to do when they are summoned to a consultation" (Immanuel Kant, *On the Old Saw:* That May Be Right in Theory but It Won't Work in Practice [1793], trans. by E.B. Ashton, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 1974, p. 41). In sections 84 and 85 of his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein made a similar claim while considering the eventuality of a "a rule determining the application of a rule": "A rule stands there like a sign-post. – Does the sign-post leave no doubt open about the way I have to go? Does it show which direction I am to take when I have passed it; whether along the road or the footpath or cross-country? But where is it said which way I am to follow it; whether in the direction of its finger or (e.g.) in the opposite one?" (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* [1953], trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe, Blackwell, Malden 1999, p. 39).

[208] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [1787], trans. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, p. 268.

sense:[209] its paralyzing effects on the mental faculty of judgment would contribute to the perpetuation of an unjust status quo.

Moving the focus from *justice* to *truth* – i.e. to something that explicitly "carries within itself an element of coercion"[210] – could offer a way out of this conundrum, while at the same time allowing us to fully grasp what is at stake in the Cynical model of anger. Indeed, speaking of truth seems to reduce the room for debate: while being unable to converge on the same universal principle of structural injustice or justified anger (on its overall plausibility as well as its particular applicability) sounds not unreasonable in itself and should not necessarily worry us too much, going for significantly different notions of truth could easily make any discussion between holders of different views pointless in advance. In other words, the very notion of truth appears to accept disagreement less easily[211].

On the other hand, speaking of truth in the political realm is dangerous, especially for those who aspire to change the existing state of affairs – the risk being to be branded as intolerant. Add to this the fact that we are dealing with modes of political participation that focus on anger, and the appeal to the supposed truth of the fight against injustice begins to look like a perfect pretext for a reactionary counterattack.

Yet it was two of the harshest critics of the implicit authoritarianism of a purportedly objective and enlightened rationality, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, who wrote that "There is only one expression for truth: the thought which repudiates injustice"[212]. The repudiation in question was obviously not *logical* (as in the sentence "Injustice does not exist"), but rather *dialectical*, i.e. marking the overcoming of a

[209] I'm here referring to Raymond Geuss's classification of the meanings of ideology (see his *The Idea of a Critical Theory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1981, pp. 13-19).

[210] Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics", in Ead., *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, Penguin, New York 2006 [1968], p. 235.

[211] It may be objected that shifting to truth would still not solve the question of determining judgement, because disagreement may nonetheless arise about whether a given truth-criterion is satisfied in a certain situation. As it will become clear at the end of this chapter, a non-demonstrative notion of truth, by being not based on determining judgement, would perform better in this respect.

[212] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments* [1944], trans. by Edmund Jephcott, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2002, p. 181.

contradiction: thought would repudiate injustice just as the proletariat would repudiate capital from a Marxist perspective. How can such a thesis be defended without having to resort to a specific notion of justice that would bring us back to square one?

Truth as Critique of Social Contradictions?

To begin with, we can try to keep faith to the dialectical element of negation, following in Rahel Jaeggi's steps[213]. According to her, the best way to evaluate social practices is *immanent criticism*, which criticizes an object based on standards that are already contained in the object itself, without the need to endorse a particular theory of justice based on external normative standards[214]. Key to this strategy is the notion of *dialectical contradiction*, a problem "with a systematic basis *in* a given social formation […] created by this formation *itself* and [that] cannot be solved within it"[215]. A fundamental tool of both Hegelian and Marxian dialectic, Jaeggi wants to recover the concept of contradiction without recurring to any kind of philosophy of history. Social contradictions are therefore related to *objective*, immanent tensions within given ensembles of social practices (what she calls *forms of life*), but those tensions can trigger a *crisis* only if they are reflectively recognized and acted upon by social actors themselves (in Jaeggi's jargon, this accounts for the *second order* character of social contradictions)[216]. Since few things could be more contradictory than racism for a society formally based on freedom and equality, and since racism's structural character demonstrates its systemic, non-accidental relationship with the liberal-democratic form

[213] While Jaeggi's work is surely in the tradition of Horkheimer and Adorno, her degree of closeness to their thought can vary considerably. For example, Jaeggi's *critique of forms of life* is explicitly indebted to Adorno's *dialectical negativism*, i.e. the conviction that "the question of the good life can only be posed indirectly, as a question of how life is damaged" (Rahel Jaeggi, "'No Individual Can Resist': *Minima Moralia* as Critique of Forms of Life", in *Constellations* 12(1), 2005, p. 72). However, when she approvingly writes that "the approach of *Minima Moralia* starts from a positive idea of a 'good universal'" (Ibid., p. 74) Jaeggi takes a position that would be difficult to square with the later Adorno of *Negative Dialectics*.

[214] On immanent criticism (and how it differs from *internal* criticism) see Rahel Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life* [2014], trans. by Ciaran Cronin, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2018, pp. 190ff.

[215] Ibid., p. 258.

[216] Ibid., pp. 268-271 and 163ff.

of life, couldn't anti-racist (true) anger be seen precisely as a means to build on such a social contradiction and ignite an emancipatory crisis? Racist (false) anger, on the contrary, seems to ignore where the actual contradiction is, only delaying its critical manifestation.

Though appealing, a reading of this kind would ignore several key features in Jaeggi's proposal. In fact, in an attempt to both avoid a teleological interpretation of social critique and maintain the latter's politically progressive character, she needs to conceive social contradictions and crises through the pragmatic logic of problem-solving: in dealing with a contradiction, societies have to replace some of their social practices with other, non-contradictory ones. Such a "solution" to the "problem" would always be contingent and temporary (because there is no historical necessity behind it and societies never cease to learn about themselves), but it would also allow a given society to historically build upon its solutions to a certain family of problems, potentially making them more and more refined[217].

Structural forms of injustice, which tend to go on for considerable periods of time, are not easily positioned within this framework: they clearly generate contradictions at both the objective and the reflective levels, but they do not seem to have ever been "solved". It is not the case – as Jaeggi would have it – that what initially looked as the solution (say, racial segregation) to an earlier problem (slavery) later became unsatisfactory for the improving standards of US society. Rather, the problem itself (structural racism) was never solved in the first place – it was only reproduced in a different shape, and African Americans were aware of that. This example brings to light another blind spot in Jaeggi's model: when it comes to social contradictions, there is no unitary "society" facing them. Indeed, what may look as a social contradiction for some members of a society (e.g. anti-racist people) may be considered not contradictory at all by others (e.g. racist people). Moreover, not only "problems" but "solutions" themselves are all but transparent from the perspective of immanent criticism. Take, for instance, the case of

[217] Ibid., pp. 233-236.

so-called *culturalist racism* against immigrants, which purportedly attaches the enjoyment of equal rights to the mimetic adoption of the local culture. For the cultural racist, the contradiction between formal equality and racialized inequality can be easily solved through cultural assimilation: as long as immigrants are willing and able to abandon their language, religious beliefs and cultural norms for the local ones, their equal rights can be recognized[218]. Such a proposal may well count as a "solution" within Jaeggi's framework, but it hardly constitutes a way to contrast racism – at best, it trades one version for another.

All these problems are bound to affect the status of anti-racist anger. Let us recall from the Introduction the angry protests against the statue portraying the colonialist and slave owner Indro Montanelli in Milan. For the majority of the Italian public opinion, having it standing in a public park entitled after Montanelli himself was not a contradiction of gender and racial equality as mandated by the law or by some moral duty. Indeed, the monument was meant to celebrate Montanelli the journalist, not the colonialist or the rapist. Angrily throwing paint at it was not seen, accordingly, as a way to voice social critique, but as an act of vandalism. Without any normative criterion to distinguish between different potential contradictions, Jaeggi's theory would end up defining as such only those social tensions that have already got enough political traction to trigger a crisis – i.e. only those which a sufficiently high number of people have reflectively recognized as such and upon which they would be ready to act accordingly. What gets lost, in so doing, is precisely the ethical iconoclasm voiced by figures like Horkheimer and Adorno.

[218] Cf. Étienne Balibar, "Is There a 'Neo-Racism'?", in Id. and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (1988), trans. by Chris Turner, Verso, London-New York 1991, pp. 20-26.

Truth as Whatever-Ontology?

A second possible strategy to prove the truth of radical anger without endorsing any specific normative theory would involve the adoption of a minimalist ontology: precisely because there is no essence to which human existence should be reduced, nothing that human beings *have to* be, one could follow Giorgio Agamben in claiming that "the being most proper to humankind is being one's own possibility or potentiality"[219]. What is *potential* does not coincide with what is not, but represents "the existence of non-Being, the presence of an absence"[220]: the actor's acting potential does not disappear when he is not on the scene, but continues to exist even when it is not enacted. If potentiality is the distinguishing feature of human existence, then "the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life" – this is what Agamben refers to as a *form-of-life*, i.e. a life that cannot be separated from its form, from the radical contingency marking all its identity traits[221]. Racism could therefore be conceived as an essentialist way of nailing a person to an arbitrary set of features (e.g. the colour of her skin, her place of birth), radically denying that very potentiality which makes her human[222]. From this angle, anti-racist anger would be true because it defends the fundamental ontological potentiality denied to racialized people – while on the other hand racist anger would be false since it goes against such a potentiality[223].

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[219] Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* [1990], trans. by Michael Hardt, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1993, p. 43.

[220] Giorgio Agamben, "On Potentiality" [1986], in Id., *Potentialities. Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1999, p. 179.

[221] Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End. Notes on Politics* [1996], trans. by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2000, pp. 3-4.

[222] An analogous reading of Agamben's ontology has been proposed by Judith Butler in *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1997, p. 131.

[223] It is important to note here that Agamben's form of life cannot be easily challenged by making reference to determining judgement (i.e. by asking whether and how every particular instance of racism would be in contrast with "form-of-life" taken as a general concept). In fact, in his later study of Christian monasticism Agamben explicitly claims that a form-of-life can be conceived only outside the relationship between norm and action, between the universal and the particular, which characterizes determining judgement (Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty. Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, trans. by Adam Kotsko, Stanford University Press, 2013, pp. 71-72). Whether that argument is convincing in its own merit is not something I can deal with here.

While attractive, this argument rests on unstable premises. As Agamben himself recognizes, there can be no historical necessity mandating that a form-of-life founded on potentiality becomes our mode of existence in the future[224] – worse: our current predicament may well be said to provide a constant denial of it, as demonstrated by the pervasiveness of racism and other structural injustices. Can we find any sign for hope regarding the realizability of a form-of-life? According to him, our era provides nonetheless the best starting point for the recognition of our ontological potentiality, for two reasons.

On the one hand, our *society of the spectacle* - which Agamben, following Debord, sees as the late stage of capitalism[225] - has managed to transform nearly anything "into a single spectacular commodity where everything can be called into question except the spectacle itself". It is precisely when the commodity form absorbs everything, from feelings to values, that its spectacle recedes to sheer communicability, to pure language – that is, to the dimension in which human potentiality most clearly emerges[226]. On the other hand, we are witnessing "a massive accumulation and proliferation of *apparatuses*", i.e. of things having "in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings"[227]. Contemporary apparatuses, according to Agamben, are characterized by *desubjectification*: those who are oriented or controlled by them do not get in return any subjective identity, but only a membership in an anonymous mass (mobile phone users, tv spectators, etc.)[228]. While this claim can appear extremely dark, for Agamben it contains a reason for optimism[229]: desubjectification implies that we can

[224] Indeed, such a necessity would be incompatible with his very understanding of potentiality – see Agamben, "On Potentiality", pp. 182-183.

[225] In Debord's own words: "The spectacle is capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image" (Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* [1967], trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Zone Books, New York 2006, p. 24).

[226] Agamben, *The Coming Community*, pp. 79-82.

[227] Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?* [2006], trans. by David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2009, pp. 14-15, italics mine.

[228] Ibid., pp. 20-21.

[229] Cf. Sergei Prozorov, "Why Giorgio Agamben is an optimist", in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36(9), 2010, pp. 1057-1060.

no longer fool ourselves with "historical tasks", that nation-states and peoples themselves are clearly "bound to disappear"[230]. In other words, the ever-increasing nihilism of the society of the spectacle would offer the opportunity to realize the arbitrariness of any notion of identity, potentially enabling us to live as *whatever singularities*[231] – that is, opening the doors of an existence worthy of our true ontology. Unfortunately, the very reasons Agamben presents in favour of the realizability of his political ontology discourage any use of the latter for anti-racist purposes – or for contrasting any other structural injustice. In fact, the endless reproduction of racialization in our age is something which is impossible to explain within his framework, where the fading out of fixed identities is taken for granted and the role of structural injustices in clipping human potentiality never dealt with. Moreover, Agamben's liquidation of collective identities as relics of a reactionary past prevents any radical reading of anti-racist (not to speak of anti-colonial, or even feminist) politics[232] - as Hannah Arendt famously had it: "If one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew"[233].

If Agamben's notion of form-of-life is problematic for our purposes, things get even worse with the specular concept of *bare life*[234] - modelled on the inmates of Nazi

[230] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open. Man and Animal* [2002], trans. by Kevin Attell, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2004, p. 76.

[231] "The Whatever in question here relates to singularity not in its indifference with respect to a common property (to a concept, for example: being red, being French, being Muslim), but only in its being *such as it is*. Singularity is thus freed from the false dilemma that obliges knowledge to choose between the ineffability of the individual and the intelligibility of the universal. The intelligible, according to a beautiful expression of Levi ben Gershon, is neither a universal nor an individual included in a series, but rather 'singularity insofar as it is whatever singularity.' In this conception, such-and-such being is reclaimed from its having this or that property, which identifies it as belonging to this or that set, to this or that class (the reds, the French, the Muslims) - and it is reclaimed not for another class nor for the simple generic absence of any belonging, but for its being-*such*, for belonging itself" (Agamben, *The Coming Community*, pp. 1-2, italics in the original).

[232] Agamben's neglect of racialization, colonialism and patriarchy has been remarked by many authors (among others: Ewa Płonowska Ziarek, "Bare Life on Strike: Notes on the Biopolitics of Race and Gender", in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107(1), 2008, pp. 89-105; Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus. Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, Duke University Press, Durham 2014, esp. pp. 34-38, 64-65, 72, 86; Sara-Maria Sorentino, "Natural Slavery, Real Abstraction, and the Virtuality of Anti-Blackness", in *Theory & Event* 22(3), 2019, pp. 651-653).

[233] Hannah Arendt, "What Remains? The Language Remains: A Conversation with Günther Gaus", in Ead., *Essays in Understanding. 1930-1954*, Schocken Books, New York 2005 [1967], p. 12.

[234] Bare life is the notion in which the maximum distance and the greatest proximity to the form-of-life coincide: being identified by a sheer biological datum totally independent from her will, be it fingerprints or DNA, deprives a human being

camps[235]. Bare life is a life that law itself situates outside its purview, therefore exposing it to a violence that won't be legally punishable[236]. It has a liminal, paradoxical status: placed beyond the jurisdiction of any norm, it is there only as a consequence of the application of some norm. At work here is a binary logic: either you are inside the legal order or you are outside[237], a dichotomy that Agamben reinforces by asserting the substantial equivalence of all the cases in which a life appears to be collocated (partially or fully, for a very limited time or indefinitely) outside the guarantees of the rule of law, from extermination camps to zones of temporary administrative detention in French airports (*zones d'attente*)[238]. What is lost in Agamben's otherwise admirable denunciation of such cases is a key feature of structural injustice: its hierarchical dimension. Young herself noted that structural injustice doesn't merely oppose full exclusion to full inclusion but usually operates according to hierarchies between social positions that can be "above" and "below" some others[239]. The very notion of *intersectionality*, which points to the mutual connections between different patterns of injustice, would be inconceivable within a binary logic[240].

It is then not by chance that, in his infamous commentaries published during the first waves of the Covid-19 pandemic, Agamben repeatedly compared people experiencing limitations of movement imposed for public health reasons to Jews under Nazi rule, or

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of any potentiality to be seen otherwise (whatever she says or does, she is who her biometric data tells us that she is); at the same time, nowhere the purely preposterous status of identity appears more clearly as in the absurd attempt to reduce the potentiality that human life is to her identification card. The most explicit formulation of this thesis can be found in Giorgio Agamben, "Identity without the Person", in Id., *Nudities*, trans. by David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2011 [2009], pp. 52-54.

[235] "Insofar as its inhabitants were stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life, the camp was […] the most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realized, in which power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation" (Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1998 [1995], pp. 170-171).

[236] Ibid., eg. pp. 9-11; 85.

[237] This objection has been raised by many authors. See, for example: Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, The Multiplication of Labor*, Duke University Press, Durham 2013, pp. 147-150; 188-189.

[238] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 174.

[239] See for instance her remarks on the injustice of the contemporary division of labor and the role of education in reproducing it: Iris Marion Young, "Education in the Context of Structural Injustice: A symposium response", in *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 38(1), 2006, pp. 94-96.

[240] For a good introduction to the notion of intersectionality see Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality*, Polity, Cambridge 2020.

teachers who moved their classes online because of the virus to the university professors who swore loyalty to Mussolini[241]. As demonstrated at length by Sergei Prozorov, within Agamben's thought the category of *bare life* plays *both* a transcendental and an empirical role, in the light of which there is no available way to adjudicate between its particular uses: "first posited as a presupposition for the constitution of any form of life whatsoever, [it] increasingly features as an empirical attribute, launching a series of 'extreme if not arbitrary' examples of lives", of which people experiencing Covid-19 limitation are only the most recent[242]. Even for those who would like to join Agamben in criticizing sanitary curfews or the like, having to do so with the very same concept employed to denounce the Holocaust or the society of spectacle sounds – to put it mildly – unappealing. Indeed, given its limitless applicability, not only does bare life sever whatever connection it may have had with structural injustice, but it also loses the power to justify political anger of any sort, since a feature characterizing all cases is characterizing none. Our search for the truth of radical anger must look elsewhere.

Truth as the Event of an Exemplary Life

What I see as the most promising strategy to reclaim the truthfulness of anger against structural injustice is a different notion of form of life: neither a bundle of social practices (as in Jaeggi) nor a sheer ontological ideal (as in Agamben), but something in between. In order to locate it, we need to combine Foucault's reading of Cynicism with a key distinction he made a few years earlier – that between *truth-demonstration* and *truth-event*. The first, which has its most successful manifestation in modern science, is linked to "a technology of demonstration", a set of instruments, categories and rules to

[241] See the articles collected in Giorgio Agamben, *Where Are We Now? The Epidemic as Politics*, trans. by Valeria Dani, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham 2021. Untranslated pieces are available in Italian from Agamben's blog: https://www.quodlibet.it/una-voce-giorgio-agamben .

[242] Sergei Prozorov, "A Farewell to Homo Sacer? Sovereign Power and Bare Life in Agamben's Coronavirus Commentary", forthcoming in *Law and Critique*, esp. p. 14 (early view available here: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10978-021-09314-x).

find truth[243]. This is also the kind of truth of normative ethics beyond which we are trying to move, the one that in order to ascertain whether political anger is just would apply to it some specific normative principle. Truth-event, on the other hand, is "a dispersed, discontinuous, interrupted truth which will only speak or appear from time to time, where it wishes to, in certain places; a truth which does not appear everywhere, at all times, or for everyone; a truth which is not waiting for us, because it is a truth which has its favourable moments, its propitious places, its privileged agents and bearers"[244]. Such a truth does not try to impose itself with the force of argument, or of a series of standardized laboratory experiments. Far from being the contrary of scientific truth or just an alternative to it, it is a qualitatively different truth, an older (and wider) continent. This is the ethical truth that Foucault later linked to Cynical life, speaking of it as an *alethurgy*, an appearance of truth:

Cynicism is not satisfied with coupling, or establishing a correspondence, a harmony or homophony between a certain type of discourse and a life conforming to the principles stated in that discourse. Cynicism links mode of life and truth in a much tighter, more precise way. It makes the form of existence an essential condition of truth-telling. It makes the form of existence the reductive practice which will make space for truth-telling. Finally, it makes the form of existence a way of making truth

[243] Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power. Lectures at the Collège de France 1973-1974*, trans. by Graham Burchell, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke 2006, pp. 235-236.

[244] Ibid., p. 236. Foucault's distinction has something in common with Heidegger's critique of truth as *correctness* or *correspondence* and his related view of truth as an *event of disclosure*, best expressed in the series of writings that extends from §44 of *Being and Time* (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* [1927], trans. by J. Stambaugh, State University of New York Press, Albany 2010, pp. 204-220) to the course held in 1931-1932 (Idem, *The Essence of Truth. On Plato's Cave Allegory and* Theaetetus [1988], trans. by T. Sadler, Continuum, New York 2002), through the conference "On the Essence of Truth" (in Idem, *Basic Writings. Revised and Extended Edition*, ed. by D.F. Krell, Harper, San Francisco 1993, pp. 115-138). However, while Foucault's demonstrative truth matches well Heidegger's truth as correspondence, the same cannot be said of their respective conceptions of evenemential truth. For Foucault, truth-event speaks through a subject – a subject who can in a sense even embody it. On the other hand, the Heideggerian truth as disclosure always appears as if from a distance – what Heidegger would call *the open* – and therefore the subject never quite touches it. Whether one opts for a reading that stresses the Heideggerian subject's passivity in the face of truth (something more evident in the first and third texts mentioned above, as well as in places such as the *Letter on Humanism*), or prefers to focus on the almost belligerent tones used in the 1931-1932 course, what emerges is the antipolitical, mystical character of that distance (see respectively Brian Elliott, "Community and Resistance in Heidegger, Nancy and Agamben", in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 37(3), 2011, pp. 259-271 and Roberto Esposito, *Politics and Negation. For an Affirmative Philosophy*, trans. by Z. Hanafi, Polity, Cambridge 2019, pp. 47-56).

itself visible in one's acts, one's body, the way one dresses, and in the way one conducts oneself and lives[245].

As the end of the passage shows, here we have (as in Jaeggi) a form of life that is strictly related to historically contingent social practices, from the clothes one wears to the way she behaves in public. At the same time, there is something which makes such an existence deeply original, stressing (as in Agamben) the potency of a certain singularity: the Cynics usually walked alone, and their very solitude made their angry critique of what Agamben would call apparatuses all the more impressive.

For us, however, living at a time when demonstrative truth seems the only game in town, it is difficult to understand how the Cynics' very behaviour could be *true*. In fact, we are used to thinking of truth as of something that compels, that comes with a force greater than the mere expression of an uncompromising individual conduct[246]. The process of subsumption of a particular under a pregiven universal, which Kant called determining judgement, is itself a notable case of demonstrative truth – one has to prove that the features of the universal can be found in the particular.

Yet Kant also wrote of a judgment taking place in the absence of an already existing universal, i.e. *reflective judgment*[247]. Whereas he saw it as typical of the realm of aesthetics (there is no concept of beauty under which we can subsume specific objects, as beauty is not a property of the object[248]), Arendt famously tried to reclaim it for

[245] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, p. 172. Cf. also Id., *The Government of the Self and Others. Lectures as the Collège de France 1982-1983*, trans. by Graham Burchell, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke 2010, pp. 343ff.

[246] Foucault himself would agree with this remark, as long as one admits that what compels in demonstrative truth is not the respect of a demonstrative protocol, but a motivating force that is of the realms of ethics and politics, not logics: "In all reasoning there is always this assertion that consists in saying: if it is true, then I will submit; it is true, *therefore* I submit […] This "therefore" that links the "it is true" and the "I submit," or which gives the truth the right to say: you are forced to accept me because I am the truth — in this "therefore," this "you are forced," "you are obliged," "you have to submit," in this "you have to" of the truth, there is something that does not arise from the truth itself in its structure and content. The "you have to" internal to the truth, immanent to the manifestation of the truth, is a problem that science in itself cannot justify and account for" (Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living. Lectures at the Collège de France 1979-1980*, trans. by Graham Burchell, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke 2014, pp. 96-97, italics in the original).

[247] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 15

[248] Ibid., e.g. p. 51.

ethical and political life[249], among other things through a reconsideration of the Socratic dictum "It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong". In the Platonic dialogues where Socrates attempts to defend such a proposition before his interlocutors, he fails completely[250]. In fact, Socrates' argument in favour of his maxim was logically flawed and therefore totally unconvincing from the perspective of demonstrative truth[251]. Nonetheless – Arendt noted – his ethical teaching had a long-lasting influence: "only religious commandments [...] can claim greater recognition"[252]. To solve this apparent puzzle, she resorted to a key element of Kant's theory of reflective judgment, the *example*:

> We must ask ourselves how [Socrates' statement] could ever have obtained its degree of validity. Obviously, this has to be due to a rather unusual kind of persuasion; Socrates decided to stake his life on this truth – to set an example, not when he appeared before the Athenian tribunal but when he refused to escape the death sentence. And this teaching by example is, indeed, the only form of "persuasion" that philosophical truth is capable of without perversion or distortion[253].

In other words, Socrates did not convince his disciples of the truthfulness of that particular teaching through the strength of his arguments – they were, to be fair, deeply unpersuasive. However, though lacking a compelling logical demonstration, he embodied the truth of his statement with his own life, making it appear as an event. To be sure, Socrates still fell short of Cynical exemplarity – the Cynics would have objected that there was no point in dying for the laws of the city, because they were always unnecessary and usually unjust. Moreover, Arendt didn't realise that, in her appeal to Athenian laws, she might have reintroduced the same determining judgement that

[249] See esp. Hannah Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy" [1965-1966], in Ead. *Responsibility and Judgment*, Schocken Books, New York 2003, pp. 49-148 and Ead., *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* [1970], University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1982.
[250] The most telling reference comes from Plato's *Gorgias*, 469b-474c.
[251] As shown by Gregory Vlastos (*Socrates. Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991, pp. 139-144).
[252] Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics", p. 243.
[253] Ibid.

Socrates seemed to have avoided via exemplarity: aren't laws just universal principles waiting to be applied to real-life scenarios?[254] Still, she put us on the right track to understand how Foucault's evenemential truth can work: it is a matter of allowing to appear, through one's own conduct, a *form of life* realising a relationship with ourselves and with others that different modes of existence could not achieve. The event of Cynical life was true because it was the *good life*, the only life allowing one to exist in harmony with oneself[255].

It must be added that, differently from truth-demonstration, truth-event does not rule out any other manifestation of truth, but leaves the door open for different ways to live an exemplary existence: the point is not in choosing once and for all between Socrates and Diogenes' "radicalized Socraticism" (this will remain, to borrow again from Kantian aesthetics, a matter of *taste*), but between them and the sophists, the slave-owners, or the tyrants. Far from being a limit, such an openness makes truth-event compatible with a pluralistic understanding of politics, allowing it to persuade without becoming despotic.

This is also the reason why the truth of an exemplary life can prove particularly effective in challenging the dominant emotional economy, also playing a pedagogical role. As the pedagogist Lars Løvlie has claimed, the force of the example in moral education rests on its nature as *construct* rather than *constraint*[256]. Indeed, while rules and prohibitions are inert prescriptions that can only be followed or violated, the

[254] An alternative would be here reformulating legal concepts beyond the logics of judgment – the most notable attempt being Deleuze's distinction between law (*loi*), right (*droit*) and jurisprudence (*jurisprudence*) (See, for instance, Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 169). While Deleuze's remarks on the philosophy of law are scattered and unsystematic, it is indeed possible to put them together in a consistent whole, as masterfully done by Laurent de Sutter (*Deleuze's Philosophy of Law* [2009], trans. by N.F. Schott, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2021). Elsewhere, I tried to show that Deleuzian insights are at work in the unique legal system of Rojava (West Kurdistan) – see "L'esempio di Maria Edgarda Marcucci", in *Il Tascabile*, 3/6/2022.

[255] I think this is the best way to reconcile the different nuances of Adorno's notion of *das richtige Leben* ("the true life", but also "the right life", "the good life") as recently analyzed by Judith Butler (*Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Ma) 2015, chap. 6). The original reference can be found in Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflections on a Damaged Life* [1951], trans. by E.F.N. Jephcott, Verso, London-New York 2005, p. 39, although the English translation ("Wrong life cannot be lived rightly") perhaps does not do justice to the complexity of the German text (*Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen*).

[256] Lars Løvlie, "The Uses of Example in Moral Education", in *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 31(1), 1997, p. 420.

evenementiality of the example, its unavoidable reference to a particular life (or particular lives) makes room for that distance in which ethical autonomy thrives. In other words, the truth of the example calls for *emulation* rather than *imitation*[257]; and even when emulation does not take place, ethical reflection and imagination are stimulated by the appearance of a form of life at odds with the emotional economy allowing this and/or that form of structural injustice[258].

Thus, evenemential truth is as radical as it is without guarantees: a logical truth is immutable, while a truth that manifests itself through a certain form of life must be constantly recreated, renewed, put to the test. It is therefore an anti-essentialist truth, because it does not benefit from metaphysical or normative shortcuts and is intrinsically linked to its context - the behaviour and dispositions that coincide with a true life will vary from case to case, and the very possibility of leading such a life will be exposed to contingency. One of the problems at the heart of Adorno's philosophy was precisely the possibility of living a true life in a society that provided hospitable conditions only for a false one - a possibility about which he remained sceptical and which would in any case have implied a constant exercise of self-criticism, a "resistance to all the things imposed on us, to everything the world has made of us, and intends to make of us to a vastly greater degree"[259]. Anger is perhaps the emotional situation most akin to such a philosophy of resistance, which led Adorno to assert that "given the way the world is organized, even the simplest demand for integrity and decency must necessarily lead almost everyone to protest"[260]. Let us now bring these insights into the context of antiracist anger.

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[257] "The effect of the exemplary person may of course be one of imitation, that is, the taking over of the other's gestures, thoughts and taste. But imitation is not […] the proper work of the example. Imitation collapses the distance between the person imitated and the person imitating. With the loss of distance the freedom of choice is narrowed, individual autonomy is threatened and the readiness for alternative role-learning is impaired. Emulation, on the other hand, may be taken as the term for the free reception of the other, satisfying the person's search for a worthwhile repertoire of action" (Ibid., p. 419).

[258] Cf. Ibid., pp. 419-421.

[259] Theodor W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy* [1963], trans. by Rodney Livingstone, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2001, p. 168.

[260] Ibid., p. 167.

The biography of a person who has made racism the central motive of her existence will never measure up to that of one who has found it in anti-racism - and not because of the former's lesser correspondence to some more or less arbitrary principle of justice, but in light of the inherently exclusionary and hierarchical structure of race. To be a white supremacist and to look happily in the mirror every morning is not impossible, but its price is that of a colossal denial, of a confinement of one's inner and social life into the narrow spaces where the consequences of one's actions are not perceived. Considered in the abstract, the decision to hate those who come from another country or who have skin of a different colour is neither true nor false. It is when we move from an abstract to an evenemential (or exemplary) level that the racist's life is revealed for the miserable lie that it is, while the anti-racist's one shines with the glow of true life. Anger enters the picture as soon as we realize, following Adorno, that in a world as unjust as ours a person with some sense of justice couldn't remain untouched. For many people, the injustice they experience is so pervasive that they may literally be said to *feel* it: as soon as that feeling is not just one of suffering or (even worse) lack of respect for oneself, but it incorporates some sense of the wrong done to oneself and the need to react in some way against it[261], we have radical anger.

It is now possible to take up the point on which the previous chapter ended - why ballistics already assumes a certain amount of political anger in action, rather than analysing it as merely potential: we live in a context where the issue is not why people rebel, but why they do not do it more. For centuries, modern political thought has revolved around the rational justification of obedience to constituted power: from Hobbes to Rawls, through a sequence of bards of Capital, the point was to explain when and why we should obey. The plausibility of disobedience, if not anarchy, was, at least in theory, taken for granted. Today, this long tradition has been overturned: even the most civilised and embellished modes of disobedience require complex defences in order to obtain not impunity, but at best some extenuating circumstances. Political

[261] This doesn't need to happen at a conscious level.

thinkers rarely engage with the eventuality of radical political change – and when they do, it happens mostly in the register of infinite deferral or messianic prophecy[262]. And yet never has the awareness of inequality and injustice been more widespread, never have the contradictions of economic, social and political reality been clearer.

Among the "too numerous" reasons "for no longer accepting the present state of the world", Frédéric Gros recently mentioned the current process of wealth accumulation and the environmental degradation and the deepening social inequalities resulting from it [263] – but the list could continue almost endlessly. With so much reactionary anger routinely and effectively circulating, there is little doubt that more radical anger will be needed.

With Gros, we also come to the end of the small group of contemporary philosophers who have reflected on ancient Cynicism. Along the way we have met others, from Descartes to Adorno, who, while not looking back at the Cynics, made important contributions to a rethinking of anger. However, with the possible exception of Michel Foucault, who died too soon, none of them went beyond contributing to a *theory* of cynicism, i.e. of that very philosophy which had at its core the primacy of *practical* reason - implying for instance the choice of a life as a dog rather than as an academic celebrity.

The somehow provocative claim that the best political philosophy can often be found outside university departments is here as much deliberate as it is unoriginal, since it comes from the late Gilles Deleuze. "There is – he reminded us – a philosophy-becoming which has nothing to do with the history of philosophy and which happens through those whom the history of philosophy does not manage to classify"[264]. The next three chapters of this dissertation will then turn to figures who formulated some

[262] Slavoj Žižek is both a notable example of such a tendency and one of its best critics – see, among others, his *In Defense of Lost Causes*, Verso, London 2008, chap. 7.

[263] Frédéric Gros, *Disobey! The Philosophy of Resistance*, trans. by David Fernbach, Verso, London-New York 2020, Premise.

[264] Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, p. 2.

elements of a political philosophy of anger through their lives no less than through their words.

Chapter 4. Portrait of the Artist as an Angry Woman: On Valerie Solanas

Feminism as Practice and Theory

A reasonable place to start our search for a political philosophy of anger is the relationship between theory and practice. In the previous chapter we saw that the Cynics embodied perhaps better than anybody else the consistency between life and discourse that was typical of ancient philosophy. It is therefore plausible, while looking for promising contemporary accounts of radical anger, to begin by asking what political movement or cultural current has espoused that consistency the most within the fight against structural injustices.

We may go, for example, to critics of class injustice - indeed, capitalism seems nowadays stronger than ever, always bringing with itself its rich catalogue of class inequalities. However, the very ubiquity of capitalism often makes it difficult to decide what a commitment to class justice would practically imply – and it is not difficult to imagine cases in which an affiliation with some kind of anti-capitalist thought is combined with virtually no political praxis at all. Indeed, one of the objections often raised against particularly abstract notions of equality is precisely that they do not pay enough attention to the kind of social and individual actions that promoting equality would require in a capitalist scenario[265].

The concrete demands of the struggle against racial injustice, on the other hand, would surely be easier to discern, at least at the level of everyday life. Nonetheless, many profess themselves antiracists in theory while rarely spending much time in the company of individuals belonging to a racially discriminated group. Even worse, one of the key

[265] Cf. G.A. Cohen, *If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2001.

features of today's colorblind racism[266] is white people's tendency to isolate themselves (both socially and spatially) from non-whites[267].

Feminism, instead, offers no such escapes: women were sometimes referred to as a "minority group" by virtue of an asymmetry of power vis-à-vis the "majority group" of men[268], but they make up about half of any human community. It is virtually impossible to belong to a society where one does not frequently come into contact with women. Clearly enough, this does not imply that a formal adherence to some version of feminist theory is never combined with the lack of a consistent praxis. However, when such an inconsistency occurs, it is more evident and open to criticism – and to one that does not merely notice the incomplete nature of the feminism at stake, but that rather points out the impossibility of considering any theory, taken in isolation, as actually feminist. A feminist thought worthy of the name, in other words, cannot take place without some commitment to living *a feminist life*[269].

"Feminism – Catharine MacKinnon reminds us – was a practice long before it was a theory", the primacy of practical reason being therefore one of its key features (an element that is shares with ancient Cynicism). Feminist theorists, she argues, should always move from "women's resistance, visions, consciousness, injuries, notions of community, experience of inequality" – in a word, from their lives[270]. From this angle,

[266] The word "colorblind" was introduced in the United States by Supreme Court Justice John Marshall Harlan, in his dissenting opinion to the Court's ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). Harlan claimed that whites had nothing to fear from racial integration and competition, because their better skills, training, knowledge and their general superiority would guarantee their privileged condition. Nowadays, the term is used mostly to define policies which reject affirmative action on racial discrimination grounds – therefore denying the lasting effects of institutional racism. As David Theo Goldberg wrote: "Colorblindness […] takes as its register the color to which it purports to be blind. It sees race while asserting a blindness to that which it must see to express the disavowal. This is seeing through race in the sense both of seeing the world framed by race and of not recognizing the pitfalls, limits, privileges, and burdens such frames enable and produce. Racial nonracialism, epistemologically, is knowingly ignorant and, in political terms, committedly non-committal. A special kind of perverse double consciousness" (*Are We All Postracial Yet?*, Polity, Cambridge 2015, p. 21).

[267] See Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists. Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2022, 6th edition, chap. 7.

[268] A terminology of this kind has been used, for instance, within French materialist feminism. See Sara Garbagnoli, "Il femminismo materialista", in Anna Curcio (ed.), *Introduzione ai femminismi*, DeriveApprodi, Rome 2019, p. 60.

[269] Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, Duke University Press, Durham 2017, p. 14.

[270] Catharine A. MacKinnon, "From Practice to Theory, or What is a White Woman Anyway?", in *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 4, 1991, p. 14.

theory does not disappear, but is no longer considered in the abstract: embedded in a network of power relations, it becomes a practice itself, blurring any clear-cut distinction between the two spheres. When theory, in bell hooks's words, "is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation - no gap exists between theory and practice"[271]. Such a consistency has often been paid at a high price by feminist scholars and intellectuals, who have seen the epistemic status and methodological appropriateness of their work continually challenged within many fields, not least philosophy[272].

It is therefore not surprising that the first figure guiding us towards a political philosophy of anger is a feminist author. It is rather her identity which may cause scandal: Valerie Solanas surely appears as a less than ideal testimonial. While it is usually believed that portraying feminism as a form of men-hatred or a mere inversion of male chauvinism is an entirely unfounded reactionary cliché, Solanas was that atypical feminist who actually wrote a manifesto calling for the elimination of men[273]. To complicate things

[271] bell hooks, "Theory as a Liberatory Practice", in *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 4, 1991, p. 2. An interesting – and almost completely unexplored – issue is the potential connection between contemporary feminist readings of the theory-practice nexus and Antonio Gramsci's *philosophy of praxis*. Taken in its simplest form, the latter is just a reiteration of the classical materialistic move pointing out the unavoidable relationship between what Gramsci called, in a typically Marxist fashion, "human will (superstructure) and the economic structure" (Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the* Prison Notebooks [1929-1935], edited and translated by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, International Publishers, New York 1971, p. 376). From such an angle, Gramsci would be merely applying to different historical circumstances what Marx already knew: that no kind of knowledge can be completely independent from a historically situated mode of production. One may ask, however, whether Gramsci's philosophy of praxis also involves – as much feminist scholarship does – a *primacy* of praxis over philosophy in a way that, if not foreign to Marx himself, would constitute nonetheless a significant innovation in the trajectory of Marxism (cf. the recent book by Marcello Mustè, *Marxism and Philosophy of Praxis. An Italian Perspective from Labriola to Gramsci*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke 2021). Indeed, in Gramsci's unsystematic references to the notion of *punto di vista* ("standpoint", "point of view") there may well be a commonality with the epistemological tenets of feminist standpoint theory (for some preliminary steps in this direction, see Kaela Jubas, "Reading Antonio Gramsci as a Methodologists", in *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 9(2), 2010, pp. 224-239).

[272] On feminist philosophy see, among others: Judith Butler, "Can the 'other' of philosophy speak?", in Ead., *Undoing Gender*, pp. 232-250; Katherine Jenkins, "'That's not philosophy': feminism, academia and the double bind", in *Journal of Gender Studies* 23(3), 2014, pp. 262-274. Significantly, Sally Haslanger seems to think that anger is the most appropriate reaction to the working conditions of women philosophers in academia ("Changing the Ideology and Culture of Philosophy: Not by Reason (Alone)", in *Hypatia* 23(2), 2008, pp. 210-223).

[273] Valerie Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto* (1967), Verso, New York 2015. Apart from a brief period during college, Solanas never officially belonged to any feminist organisation, and throughout her life she identified with the feminist movement in a rather erratic way (Breanne Fahs, *Valerie Solanas*, pp. 176-194). However, I follow Deborah Ardilli ("Effetto SCUM. Valerie Solanas e il femminismo radicale", in *Trilogia SCUM. Scritti di Valerie Solanas*, VandA.ePublishing, Milan 2017, pp. 35-60), as well as Breanne Fahs, in considering this author as one of the initiators of radical feminism in the United States, precisely because of the content of her writings and the effects they had within the women's liberation movement.

further, a dramatic event occurred in the period between the writing and the publication of her *SCUM Manifesto*: Solanas shot, luckily in a non-fatal way, the artist Andy Warhol and two friends and collaborators of his, Fred Hughes and Mario Amaya. The attempted murder clearly calls into question her political and theoretical fitness - as well as, to put it mildly, her appropriateness as a reference for a dissertation that develops a *ballistic* approach to anger. In fact, if we wanted to feed a character to the opponents of the political use of anger, it would be difficult to find one more suitable than Solanas: how can we not see in her criminal gesture the macabre and unbearable outcome of the ideas expressed in the *Manifesto*?

The existence and memory of this author have indeed been irrevocably marked by the equation between the text and the assault, interpreted as a crazy declaration and its clumsy execution[274]. However, this is certainly not the unity of theory and praxis that we can grant her today. The 2014 publication of the first biography of Solanas by the main scholar of her oeuvre, Breanne Fahs, dispelled many of the insinuations and inaccuracies circulated about her, including those reducing the *Manifesto* to a delusional terroristic text.

SCUM Manifesto, which advocated the overthrowing of the government, the elimination of the monetary system, the introduction of full automation and above all the destruction of the male sex, was written between 1965 and the first half of 1967, the result of "dozens of revisions and rewrites"[275]. It was therefore not composed during a psychotic attack or a moment of intoxication, says Fahs, who is also a clinical psychologist[276]. Those years were decisive for Solanas, coinciding with her full entry into the New York underground scene and with living conditions that, although extremely precarious, allowed some time and privacy for writing[277] - things that she would often lack afterwards. At the same time, it was probably one of the last periods

[274] Breanne Fahs, "The Radical Possibilities of Valerie Solanas", in *Feminist Studies* 34(3), 2008, p. 592; Ead., *Valerie Solanas*, pp. 59-60.
[275] Fahs, *Valerie Solanas*, p. 65.
[276] Ibid., pp. 65-66.
[277] Cf. Ibid., pp. 41-44; 56-57.

in which Solanas, who by then had already experienced a long series of abuses (sexual and non-sexual, within and outside the family) had an appreciable, if not full, control over her mental faculties. Her public readings and appearances to promote the *Manifesto*, rather than aiming at the formation of some androcide-oriented armed cell, showed a strong awareness of the avantgarde and provocative character of her work[278]. By contrast, Warhol's attempted murder in June 1968 occurred at the height of a period of anxiety, paranoia and increasing economic difficulties - as implicitly recognised by the courts of law themselves, which did not hold her able to stand trial[279].

This does not mean that there was no connection between the two events, but rather that it was an indirect, more complicated link. Through her writings and public persona, Solanas was able to convey radical feminist anger before it was conceivable to express it in a collective way. Hanging in the balance between theory and practice, between literary provocations and Diogenesque performances, "she adopted the language of a pest, plugging the kind of speech that counters while resembling hate speech"[280]. When the two men who had the power to bring her angry ideas to the wider public, Andy Warhol and the publisher Maurice Girodias, walked back from their initial commitments and disappointed her expectations, her mental health plummeted. She never recovered from the consequences of the shooting on her life. Rather, she hung on to the *Manifesto* as the most precious thing she had, identifying with it to the point that the boundaries between text and author became blurred.

What I will try to show in this chapter is that in the pages of *SCUM* we can find Solanas' great contribution to the theory and practice of radical anger. To get there, however, we first need to understand the role that anger played in her life, how she came to meaningfully combine it with humour - and the kind of political and personal isolation she went through while doing so. The next section will briefly address all these issues,

[278] E.g. Ibid, p. 84.

[279] Ibid., pp. 197-198; 206-208; 22a. In 1969, Solanas took a plea bargain (three years in criminal psychiatric hospitals including time served) – see Ibid., pp. 233-236.

[280] Avital Ronell, "Deviant Payback: The Aims of Valerie Solanas", in *SCUM Manifesto*, p. 2.

also taking into account Solanas' early writings. In the following one, after briefly summarizing the public reactions to the *Manifesto* after its eventual release, I will focus on the peculiar notion of *negation* at stake in its pages – and on how it allows us to meaningfully combine radical anger and utopia while moving towards a new abolitionism.

An Angry Killjoy (and Her Loneliness)

Throughout her life, Solanas experienced a great deal of patriarchal violence, including rape, sexual harassment, the forced removal of children already conceived and/or born against her will, and discrimination due to her sexual orientation and her occasional forays into sex work. At least since her college years beginning in 1954, anger (often mixed with abrasive humour) was her standard reaction to such violence – both a survival and a critical strategy.

A frequent contributor to her college newspaper, Solanas channelled her acute awareness of sexism in letters and commentaries addressing the injustices committed against women at the time. In one of them, for example, she replied to a male student who had claimed that women seek college degrees only as a means to find a husband:

> Do I detect a touch of male arrogance and egotism in the astute report which Mr. Parr so thoughtfully prepared for us? The insipid innuendos advanced by him are representative of the type of rationalizations indulged in by the typical, conceited, immature male. It is characteristic of males of this calibre to blithely believe that women are wasting away without them. Such a belief enhances their blatantly bloated egos. Mr. Parr would have us believe by his childish chatter that coeds, although lusting for lads, are incapable of hauling in a husband, due to the blasé indifference of their virile associates. He tries to convey an illusion of famished females being rejected on all sides by the dashing, debonair men-about-campus. This is pure nausea! One only has to attend one of the many informal

dances, and he will be impressed by the drove-like array of stags mincing mournfully about in quest of a winsome woman…[281]

Her articulate and (for that time unusually radical) feminist rhetoric made Solanas famous around campus, but also brought her many in-person fights. Her bellicosity, combined with a general disdain for social conventions, led to frequent, mandatory sessions of psychological counselling – during one of them, an angry Valerie overturned a table and almost got expelled[282].

Two years later, she quit her graduate studies in evolutionary psychology at the University of Minnesota, disheartened by the patriarchal constraints of academia – "all the grants and scholarships went to women, while all the jobs, research money, and resources went to men"[283]. After attending – and leaving – another graduate program in New Jersey, in 1962 she moved to New York, determined to become a playwright and a member of the Greenwich Village countercultural scene[284]. That was a milieu portraying itself as the height of artistic radicalism, but at the same time it tended to dismiss feminist claims within itself: wasn't the underground art scene an environment where women also worked? In fact, it was still a frighteningly sexist context, but it would begin to be partially perceived as such only in later years. Solanas, for her part, did nothing to hide her feelings - which made her as pleasant when she was in a good mood as unmanageable when sensing she was being treated unfairly.

In the mid-sixties, she started to work on her most visionary writings – the play *Up Your Ass*[285] and the *SCUM Manifesto* – and became one of the many artists and would-be celebrities gravitating around Andy Warhol's Factory. In 1965, even before knowing him personally, Solanas sent to the famous pop-artist a copy of *Up Your Ass*, hoping he

[281] Valerie Solanas, "Letter to the Editor", in *Diamondback*, University of Maryland, Baltimore 1957, reprinted in Fahs, *Valerie Solanas*, pp. 32-33.
[282] Ibid, p. 31.
[283] Ibid., p. 38.
[284] Ibid., pp. 39-44.
[285] Valerie Solanas, *Up Your Ass* [1965], Sternberg Press, London 2022. For a recent re-reading of the play along transgender lines see Andrea Long Chu, *Females*, Verso, New York 2019.

might be interested in producing it. The play narrates a series of picaresque encounters made by Valerie's alter-ego Bongi Perez, a lesbian sex-worker looking for clients on the sidewalks, while developing a satire of heteropatriarchy that was both angry and obscenely funny. To mention a typical exchange between Bongi and Ginger, a character who stands as the archetype of heteropatriarchal femininity:

Ginger: He and I established the most wonderful rapport. I think he is infatuated with me; he kept grabbing my ass and telling me how different I am. I think he senses the rebel in me. I've always been in rebellion ever since I was a kid. I remember how whenever my father'd tell me to pick my toys up I'd stamp my foot and say "No!" twice before picking them up. Oh, I was a mean one. My latest rebellion is my childhood religion; I've just rebelled against that. I used to be high episcopalian.
Bongi: What're you now?
Ginger: Low Episcopalian. (*Confidential*) Do you know there are even days when I doubt the Trinity?
Bongi: You mean Men, Money and Fucking?
Ginger: No, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. What religion do *you* belong to?
Bongi: I used to belong to the Catholic, but I wrote it off when they started talking about demoting Mary.[286]

The feminist intuitions already featured in the play would later find a more explicit, militant reformulation in the *Manifesto*. Both works received some attention in the underground scene: after an initial perplexity about it contents (he found the script so obscene to suspect that Solanas was an undercover policewoman targeting him) Warhol actually entertained the idea of producing *Up Your Ass*, while the controversial publisher Maurice Girodias secured *SCUM* publishing rights. In the end, both men fell short of their initial commitments – the first by losing interest in the play (as well as one of the few existing copies of the script) and the second by sitting on the text of the

[286] Solanas, *Up Your Ass*, pp. 30-31.

Manifesto, only to release it in a sensationalistic way immediately after Solanas' attempt on Warhol's life[287].

Valerie showed a belligerent attachment to her feminist ideas not only through her writings, but also through her public (and angry) presence, disrupting what we can call, with a notion introduced in the previous chapter, a heteropatriarchal *emotional economy*. Her infamous appearance on *The Alan Burke Show* is a case in point[288]. Burke, a quite popular conservative talk-show host, was known for his antagonistic stance towards his guests, who were often taken from the counterculture and whom he enjoyed depicting as fools. In spring 1967, shortly after Solanas completed her *Manifesto*, Burke's team was looking for lesbians talking about their emotional and sexual lives. Notwithstanding the host's reputation, she decided to join the show, which was pre-recorded. While Burke did in fact try to provoke her, acting in an openly lesbophobic way from the very beginning ("What's the matter, Valerie, can't get one? Didn't anyone ever take you to the prom?"), Solanas looked at first unimpressed, providing the interviewer and his public of "350 straight, white Midwesterns" with serious, informative answers. It was rather Burke himself who grew increasingly distressed with her proverbial honesty, becoming irritated when she informed him matter-of-factly that "men have fucked up this world". The situation escalated quickly: Burke stopped the taping (the interview was never aired) and began to explicitly insult Valerie in front of the audience – he then had to quickly run offstage, as an angry Solanas tried to hit him with a chair. It took several men, from both security and the audience, to pull Valerie away.

This anecdote, similar to many others in her biography[289], gives us a vivid representation of Solanas' Cynical posture: uncompromising in her truth-telling, she did not lack the courage to bring it to the level of ancient parrhesia, putting her own safety at risk in

[287] Fahs, *Valerie Solanas*, pp. 52-55; 86-89; 103-107; 109-115; 188. In order to sell more copies, Girodias presented the *Manifesto* as the foolish work of a criminal mind.

[288] Ibid., pp. 77-80.

[289] For example, when Warhol, made suspicious by the iconoclastic radicality of her play, asked Solanas whether she was an undercover cop, she responded as a true heir of Diogenes: "Valerie unzipped her pants, exposed her vulva, and said: 'Sure, I'm a cop and here's my badge'" (Ibid., p. 89).

order not to be silenced. With her feminist anger, she was the embodiment of what several decades later Sara Ahmed would call, recognizing her debt to the author of *SCUM Manifesto*[290], the *feminist killjoy*: one who brings into light "the bad feelings that get hidden, displaced, or denied under signs of public joy"[291]. The killjoy is perceived as emotionally foreign by those around her, because she is not happy with what *should* make her happy – i.e. she defies the normative expectations regarding the feelings she is supposed to have in a certain situation ("What's the matter, Valerie, can't get one?"). Under conditions of structural injustice those expectations are surely not unbiased, but constitute a key feature of the emotional economy of a given community. Anger, a visibly conflictual emotion, is therefore a particularly important resource for the killjoy: it breaks up a pre-existing feeling of consensus by signalling the presence of a disagreement. At the same time, those unwilling to hear voices dissenting from the hegemonic emotional economy will probably try to dismiss the feminist killjoy's anger as proof that something is wrong with her, rather than with the patriarchal context she is angry about[292] – think of Burke mockingly depicting Solanas as crazy in front of his audience.

Here we can glimpse a lesson that is still extremely relevant for the theory and practice of radical anger: when one is confronted with structural injustice, anger can easily sound out of tune, hyperbolic - and the intensity with which this will happen will be directly proportional to the efforts made to obliterate the suffering that anger brings to the surface. The feminist killjoy points her finger against what is at first glance perceived as a non-issue, at best a marginal flaw within a framework which she should rather rejoice in. Acknowledging this implies being careful to dismiss manifestations of anger initially looking out of hand or excessive - especially if they annoy those in privileged positions, if they upset their appearance by revealing the irritation and contempt that are often hidden behind the veneer of their seeming affability.

[290] Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, pp. 252-253.
[291] Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, Duke University Press, Durham 2010, p. 65.
[292] Ibid., pp. 67- 68.

These remarks also help us understand Solanas' peculiar and apparently paradoxical combination of anger and humour. The latter is similar to the former in at least one respect: it makes room for an interruption, a sudden change in the general mood – an unexpected joke can be no less arresting than an unanticipated burst of rage. It is indeed telling that Ahmed's reflections on the feminist killjoy are perfectly matched by Simon Critchley's thoughts on humour, according to which "jokes are a play upon form where what is played with are the accepted practices of a given society. The incongruities of humour both speak out of a massive congruence between joke structure and social structure, and speak against those structures by showing that they have no necessity"[293]. Solanas was a true master in bringing humour and anger as close as they can get, making fun of the deepest social taboos and getting angry in ways that could be irresistibly hilarious. For instance, in the concluding scene from *Up Your Ass* she stages a long, surreal dialogue between Bongi and a young woman who goes by her husband's name, Ms. Arthur. This particular character is introduced in a comical way, by offering a radicalized version of the typical satire of middle-class (heterosexual) marriage:

Arthur: I'm one of society's rejects – a wed mother. Imagine me dumping my kid onto the city to raise; who'd speak to me? I'm not even entitled to any sympathy; like, you know, that magic metal band around your finger transfers mistakes into blessed events. There oughta be a special home for wed pregnant girls; as it is, we not only have our pregnancies to put up with, but husbands too.
Bongi: Why do you have to put up with him?
Arthur: Well, you know how women are – loyal, faithful, dedicated and reliable.
Bongi: Yeah, and they oughta be slammed right in the teeth for it.
Arthur: Besides, the kid needs a father.
Bongi: Needs him for what?
Arthur: Oh, I don't know. If he didn't have one, he might grow up and be a faggot [sic] or something.
Bongi: That'd be just as well; let the guys ram each other in the ass and leave the women alone.
Arthur: Who wants to be left alone? I was left alone for years when I was single. You know, I was one of those nice girls – I never screwed – 'til I got married, then did nothing but.

[293] Simon Critchley, *On Humour*, Routledge, New York 2002, p. 10.

Bongi: I find that rather shocking. I mean it's indecent. There's something in terribly bad taste about married people screwing.
Arthur: Each other anyway[294].

In this passage, the spirit of the feminist killjoy is definitely present – think of Arthur calling "mistakes" what, under the given patriarchal emotional economy, count as "blessed events". At the same time, the parodic and hyperbolic nature of the exchange between Bongi and the young wife, which at times results in openly counterintuitive statements (it's distasteful for married people to have sex), allows the potential audience to keep a certain distance from what is being said on the scene. In other words, Solanas' prose can be read here as using humour as a tool for making anger both more acceptable and, in so doing, more dangerous: if the spectator is not required to take the dialogue too literally, it becomes more difficult for her to ignore that the two characters, for all their comic exaggerations, have a point. Since it is often through humour that people keep making utterances which reinforce structural injustice even in formally egalitarian contexts (think of recurring jokes against women or foreigners), using it to make anger against injustice more plausible is a subversive move[295].
In *Up Your Ass*, Solanas brought this strategy to its extreme consequences: Arthur's apparently metaphorical reference to the eventuality of "dumping" her son becomes literal when, a bit later, she suddenly chokes him and starts digging a hole in the nearby garden to hide his corpse. Such a brutal, scarcely predictable act takes place at the very end of the spectacle, at a time when the audience would have become accustomed not to take what happens on the stage "too literally". Suspension of literality and extreme, even homicidal literality go therefore hand in hand in this scene, alternating moments when humour seems to make anger more acceptable and others when it potentially amplifies the violence of anger – witnessing the killing of a child and then, as Bongi

[294] Solanas, *Up Your Ass*, pp. 73-74.
[295] Cf. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, pp. 245-246; 261.

does, joking about it ("Not here; it'll attract dogshit. There's enough turds rolling around here as it is"[296]).

Valerie's hyperbolic humour testifies also, in a way, to her political and personal loneliness, to the lack of shared concepts and words that a pioneer like her inevitably suffered. As she claimed during her college years, "Humour is not a body of logical statements which can be refuted or proved, but it is rather a quality which appeals to a sense of ludicrous. Nor can humour, if it is truly good humour, be triumphed over be mere 'massive education'"[297]. At the time she was working on her *Manifesto*, second-wave feminism - then rather moderate in its demands - had just begun to organise itself in the United States, while radical feminism did not yet exist as a component of that movement. Feminist publications were few and mostly regarded as a lifestyle phenomenon. Many of the key figures in the following mobilisations for women's rights were not yet known to the general public (the only one who had already achieved a high profile was Betty Friedan, whose exclusionary position towards non-heterosexual women made her an unattractive reference point for Solanas, who certainly did not hide her lesbian relationships)[298].

With second-wave feminist political praxis still in the beginning and the virtually complete lack of radical feminist theory, Solanas had somehow to cover for both through her angry writings and Cynical performances. For all its irony, the "additional acknowledgments" section in *Up Your Ass* perfectly summarised the loneliness of her task:

> Myself – for proofreading, editorial comment, helpful hints, criticism and suggestions, and an exquisite job of typing.
>
> I – for independent research into men, married women and other degenerates[299].

[296] Solanas, *Up Your Ass*, p. 81.

[297] Fahs, *Valerie Solanas*, p. 35.

[298] Cf. Stephanie Gilmore, Elizabeth Kaminski, "A Part and Apart: Lesbian and Straight Feminist Activists Negotiate Identity in a Second-Wave Organization", in *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16(1), 2007, pp. 95-113.

[299] Solanas, *Up Your Ass*, p. iii.

SCUM's Anger: Negation, Utopia, Abolition

One of the few people who had the chance to hear Valerie presenting her self-published version of the *SCUM Manifesto* in 1967, the feminist activist Anne Koedt, placed anger at the centre of her recollections: "'She told us it was ok to be angry, which was hard then'"[300] . When the Warhol shooting and Girodias' opportunistic release of the *Manifesto* suddenly made Solanas a public figure, an analogous sentiment rapidly spread in many quarters. The publisher Fred Jordan declared: "I thought that [*SCUM Manifesto*] was the first manifestation of women's rage against men, and I thought that it was authentic. I thought it also had a literary quality. This book made me aware, for the first time, of women's anger in a patriarchal society"[301].

The harsh disagreement about whether to offer legal aid and political support to Solanas was one of the reasons for the implosion of the National Organization of Women (NOW), then dominated by its liberal strand. Ti-Grace Atkinson, Florynce Kennedy and others left NOW after facing retaliation for having helped Valerie and founded their own organizations – an event, Fahs remarks, which "likely started radical feminism as we know it today"[302]. Nonetheless, many radical feminists haven't reclaimed Solanas as a meaningful figure for the movement: in what is considered the standard history of radical feminism in the US, Alice Echols belittles Valerie, whose significant influence on activists and intellectuals such as Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Shulamith Firestone and Ti-Grace Atkinson she describes as a misfortune more than anything else[303]. For her part, Solanas did a lot to deserve this uncharitable verdict.

After an existence of almost complete solitude and misrecognition, all of a sudden, she had the constant attention of friends and foes alike. The prisons and psychiatric hospitals

[300] Fahs, *Valerie Solanas*, p. 84.
[301] Ibid., pp. 225; 258; 84; 248-249.
[302] Ibid., p. 186.
[303] Cf. Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad. Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*, Minnesota University Press, 2019, 2nd edition, pp. 104-105; 158-185.

where she was held during the trial and in its aftermath included some of the most abusive and cruel institutions in the United States – it is possible, for instance, that while detained in one of them she was used as a guinea pig for experimental surgeries[304]. Such an environment made her paranoia stronger than ever and, in a few months, she succeeded in alienating even the kindest among her feminist allies, constantly accusing them of offering their help only to get a share of the media coverage she and the *Manifesto* were finally receiving. When a friend of hers put together a consistent sum to cover for her bail, Solanas fancied he was part of a (non-existent) criminal group she referred to as the Mob, refusing to ever meet him again[305]. Louise Thompson described the deleterious effects that imprisonment and medical violence had on Solanas in this way: "I knew her before prison, and I know she was destroyed there. She was not crazy. She was angry"[306]. Here we face a particularly dramatic instance of the pathologization of anger: when first admitted into a penitentiary for the mentally insane, Solanas was a woman beginning to suffer from psychotic attacks (the first major one was probably that during which she shot Warhol) who would have benefited from adequate care and whose anger had nothing pathological in itself. Indeed, before the shooting she had never been considered a dangerous person by those around her[307] ("She was not crazy. She was angry"). Then, the disastrous living and therapeutic conditions she experienced in the following years worsened her psychosis virtually to a point of no return – retrospectively making her feminist anger and writings as always already an issue of poor mental health. In this connection, the equation between madness, the attempted murder and the *SCUM Manifesto* was as wrong as it was ideologically reassuring, reducing Valerie's anger to a (politically meaningless) symptom once and for all.

In fact, US public opinion processed without much trouble the fact that Solanas had shot Warhol and his collaborators, but failed to give the feminist ideas expressed in the

[304] Fahs, *Valerie Solanas*, p. 222.
[305] Ibid., pp. 224-225.
[306] Ibid., p. 240.
[307] Of course: with the possible exception of Burke and his fellow lesbophobes.

Manifesto any meaning other than the proof that she had always been delirious. There was nothing politically threatening about shooting somebody over a personal disagreement - an event that could therefore become part of the background noise of a chaotic and sometimes unsafe, but all in all happy, society. Writing a text criticising the existence of masculinity itself (that is, as an institution[308]), on the other hand, would be all the more disturbing for the status quo if it was not directly linked to any criminal gesture looking as an awkward *passage a l'acte*[309]. Were it not for the reduction of the text to the assault, *SCUM Manifesto* would probably have represented a much more serious challenge to hetero-patriarchal culture. Borrowing Slavoj Žižek's words, we can say that the condition for conceiving as exceptional (and therefore not too worrisome) acts of *subjective* violence (i.e. those carried out by an easily identifiable agent) is the misrecognition of *objective* violence, which is immanent to the functioning and smooth reproduction of a given society - and that consequently does not offer individual 'perpetrators' to be pointed at. The moment one takes her eyes off the hypnotic immediacy of the crime news, she finds it easier to see the brutal background of what usually goes under "normality"[310] - in Valerie's case, hetero-patriarchy[311]).

In the remaining part of her life (she died in San Francisco in 1988), Solanas did nothing that may lead us think that she wanted to kill men or that she had ever conceived SCUM as a terroristic group committed to androcide. Far from the stereotype of the men-hater that was so often attributed to her, in the seventies she had a happy and quite long

[308] Ahmed offers us an excellent definition: "When we talk of white men […] we are describing an institution. An institution typically refers to a persistent structure or mechanism of social order governing the behaviour of a set of individuals within a given community. So when I am saying that white men is an institution, I am referring not only to what has already been instituted or built but the mechanisms that ensure the persistence of that structure" (*Living a Feminist Life*, pp. 152-153).

[309] In French clinical psychiatry, "violent, aggressive and criminal acts […] where the subject is deemed to proceed from an *idea* or *tendency* to the corresponding act" (Jean Laplanche, Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* [1967], trans. by D. Nicholson-Smith, Karnac Books, London 1988, p. 5).

[310] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence. Six Sideways Reflections*, Picador, New York 2008, pp. 1-6.

[311] Žižek's distinction, obviously, does not deny the relationship that often exists between forms of objective violence (e.g. patriarchy) and particular instances of subjective violence (e.g. femicides); in fact, it is precisely the obliteration of the former that allows to frame the latter as tragic accidents with just one, often pathologized, perpetrator (e.g. as "crimes of passion").

romantic relationship with a cis man, Louis Zwiren[312]. Always struggling with paranoia, she also developed an increasingly narcissistic and even insane identification with the *Manifesto*, which she considered the most significant feminist text ever written. In a sort of desperate radicalization of Hadot's definition of philosophy as a combination of a discourse and a life choice, Solanas pushed the two so close that they almost got to coincide. She identified first and foremost as the author of the *Manifesto* - a text for which her deceitful publisher never paid her any royalty. The less her role as an author was respected, the more she strived to reaffirm it. All the few writings she penned during her last two decades – interviews and letters to magazines – were *SCUM*-related, consisting mainly in protests against the frequent mischaracterization of her ideas. Nothing is known regarding whether she was politically active in any way during her late years[313]. For those who want to understand the enduring relevance of her feminist anger, every road, then, leads back to the *Manifesto*.

Like other radical feminist works, *SCUM* plays in parodically reversing sexist stereotypes: men are seen as "incomplete females" whose intelligence is "a mere tool in the services of [their] drives and needs", "psychically passive", unable to enjoy sex because they are "eaten up with guilt, shame, fear and insecurity". The only field in which they show a certain superiority is "public relations", thanks to which they have been able to convince females that the latter are weak and incomplete[314]. If the female's role is to "relate, groove, love and be herself, irreplaceable by anyone else", that of the male is merely to "produce sperm" - and, Solanas remarked, "We now have sperm banks"[315].

However, the *Manifesto*'s reversals open the way neither to a simple inversion of oppressors and oppressed (a world where women would rule over men), nor to a scenario in which the two sexes live together on equal terms. Solanas showed no

[312] Fahs, Valerie Solanas, pp. 265-276.

[313] Significantly, only the last thirteen pages of Fahs' biography (out of more than three hundreds) are devoted to Valerie's life in the Eighties.

[314] Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, pp. 37-40.

[315] Ibid., p. 48.

nostalgia for primitive matriarchal societies and even less so did she think that a different combination of male and female social roles (e.g. assigning men to jobs usually worked by women and vice versa) would be beneficial. In her view, the male sex was the cause of every conceivable evil, from war[316] to the impossibility of conversation[317], from capitalist exploitation[318] to bad sex (i.e. potentially all sex, as the latter is "the refuge of the mindless"[319]), from racism[320] to boredom[321]. Therefore, she drew the logical conclusion: if the root of all these deleterious phenomena was just one, it would be enough to sever it for them to disappear – men should be eliminated through selective reproduction, or even by killing them when necessary.

While a reasoning of this kind may sound already extreme, even more daring appears Solanas' description of the upcoming world inhabited only by women. The future outlined by the *Manifesto* is almost too eerie to be attractive, as if exaggerated even by the over-the-top standards of the previous parts of the text: it consists of a society based on the "laboratory reproduction of babies"[322] where, within "only a few weeks", complete automation of all forms of work is introduced and the monetary economy abolished[323]. The government will be initially replaced by a system of direct democracy based on electronic voting, but in fact everything will go so well that soon there won't be any issues to vote on[324]. Women, meanwhile, will "be busy solving the problems of disease and old age and death"[325]. On several occasions, Solanas even argued that it was not particularly important to know what exactly would happen after the elimination of men (whether, for instance, new females would continue to be artificially (re)produced

[316] Ibid., p. 40.
[317] Ibid., pp. 56-57.
[318] Ibid., pp. 41-43.
[319] Ibid., p. 61.
[320] Ibid., p. 55.
[321] Ibid., p. 63.
[322] Ibid., p. 69.
[323] Ibid., p. 70.
[324] Ibid., p. 78.
[325] Ibid., 79.

or not[326]), because in the end what mattered was that their disappearance "will mark the beginning of a fantastic new era, and there will be a celebration atmosphere accompanying the construction"[327]. Whether one wants to understand it as a form of reticence or as a change in tone, the future scenario sketched by the *Manifesto* cannot, given the long gestation of the text, be considered casual.

Solanas seems to be telling us that it is not vital to have a detailed view of what would happen, just a precise idea of what would no longer take place: masculinity and heteropatriarchy. Once this starting point is secured, "the few remaining unsolved problems", whatever they may be, will be fixed quickly, while the way in which future females will "plan their agenda for eternity and Utopia" would be decided in due course[328]. The only real cornerstone of her angry manifesto is thus, to quote the Italian poet Eugenio Montale, "what we are not, what we wish not"[329]. Jack Halberstam is surely right in recognizing in this refusal of a more substantial description the hallmark of negativity, but he makes the mistake of confusing it with an antisocial and passively nihilistic drive, reproducing once more the untenable juxtaposition between the attempted murder and the contents of the *Manifesto*[330]. By contrast, I would like to claim that it is precisely around the issue of negativity that *SCUM* offers its most important contribution to a political philosophy of radical anger, allowing us to resist two potentially disruptive objections.

The first objection takes issue with what seems to be the intrinsic connection between radical anger and negativity: while targeting structural features of a given society, radical anger is unable – the objection maintains – to imagine a world without them; even worse, its failure to provide a precise blueprint for change demonstrates that getting rid of structural injustice is not feasible in the short run. We may call this *the objection of the structural realist*: far from denying that radical anger points to significant societal

[326] Ibid., pp. 69-70.
[327] Ibid., p. 78.
[328] Ibid., pp. 78-79.
[329] Eugenio Montale, *Non chiederci la parola*, in Id., *Tutte le poesie,* Mondadori, I Meridiani, Milan 2011, p. 29.
[330] Cf. Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Duke University Press, Durham 2011, pp. 109-110.

problems, this kind of realist believes that they are in fact too significant to be addressed with the immediacy that anger would seem to require. From such an angle, it would be fair for women to have equal access to paid jobs and to be remunerated as much as men, but because our economic system – seen as the only one that has ever worked in large societies – relies on a considerable amount of free reproductive labour and of precarious, poorly paid work, both of which have been historically provided mostly by women, only in the long run may those issues (possibly) be tackled, through the elaboration of complex, incremental solutions[331]. Since social resources (including the potential for societal change) are limited, for the structural realist the emphasis put by radical anger on the need to subvert, abolish, dismantle (in a word: negate) the current status quo is at best pointless. Moreover, even if the structural realist were willing to accept that, under some rare circumstances, radical change can indeed happen quickly and without enormous collective costs, she would contend that radical anger invariably falls short on what we may refer to as *the constructiveness requirement*: it doesn't say what social structures should replace the unjust ones. Like an obstinate child, the advocate of radical anger would always say "no" without being able to know what she is actually looking for.

This practical objection is reinforced – perhaps unwillingly – by those theoretical discourses which, after equating negation with death and/or nothingness, claim that politics should be kept afar from it. The most interesting of those can surely be found in the philosophy of Roberto Esposito. According to him, modern politics is characterized by a "metaphysical machine that makes negation the form of the political and the political the content of negation"[332]. The functioning of such a machine depends on "a

[331] A more ideologically charged version of the same objection may be raised by an *individualistic realist*: there are no such things as social structures, but only individuals and small groups who, given some basic features of human anthropology, mostly act according to narrow self-interest. Within this category would fall the neoliberal rhetoric popularized by Margaret Thatcher with the famous slogan "There is no alternative" and later denounced by Mark Fisher as *capitalist realism* (see Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism. Is There No Alternative?*, Zero Books, Winchester 2009). However, I find more interesting confronting the structural version of the objection, as it often is the one that even individualistic realists try to sell to others.

[332] Roberto Esposito, *Politics and Negation. For an Affirmative Philosophy* [2018], trans. by Z. Hanafi, Polity, Cambridge 2019, p. 5.

single device", which contrasts the increasingly *common* condition of humanity (whose growing interconnection makes it vulnerable to the spreading of the same epidemics, wars, or economic crises) with a parallel growth in the tendency to *immunize* individual communities from external threats[333]. Political immunity, however, works like a vaccine: "evil must be thwarted, but not by keeping it at a distance from one's borders; rather, it is included inside them"[334].

In itself, this line of reasoning is at least as old as Hobbes, for whom what made the modern state able to protect the life of its citizens was precisely its exclusive ownership of what might have endangered and even negated that very life – i.e. the right to kill and to send people to war[335]. What makes Esposito's contribution peculiar is, on the one hand, his choice to bring further the immunological metaphor: as living bodies can develop autoimmune disorders, excessive political immunization can end up jeopardizing the life of a community and of its inhabitants even more than the original threat[336]. On the other hand, Esposito has peculiarly radicalized the role played by negation within the purportedly autoimmune tendency of modern politics. In his view, negation has been politicized, transitioning "from a linguistic status to a logical, then to an ontological, and finally to a performative status that seeks to exclude whatever is negated. This is when the negative operator […] becomes the negation of something or somebody, thereby passing from the plane of language and thought to the plane of being"[337]. His strongest example is here the negativistic circularity emerging from Carl Schmitt's famous dichotomy between *enemy* (conceived as non-friend) and *friend* (defined as non-enemy)[338]. Correspondingly, Esposito detects a "negative turn

[333] Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas. The Protection and Negation of Life* [2002], trans. by Z. Hanafi, Polity, Cambridge 2011, p. 5.

[334] Esposito, *Immunitas*, p. 8.

[335] See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, especially chap. xxviii. Among contemporary Hobbes scholars, the tenability and even the exact interpretation of his argument are intensely debated. For my purposes here, it suffices to say that I am referring to a traditional reading of Hobbes.

[336] Ibid., pp. 15-17.

[337] Esposito, *Politics and Negation*, p. 6.

[338] Ibid., pp. 3-12. Schmitt introduced the dichotomy in his *The Concept of the Political* [1927-1932], trans. by G. Schwab, University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp. 26ff.

undertaken by modern politics"[339], which he locates, among others, in the negative conceptualisations that the notion of sovereignty (seen as the negation of natural conflict) and freedom (reduced to the absence of domination or constriction) have taken in political language since Hobbes[340]. The epitomes of these autoimmune tendencies are represented, for Esposito, by totalitarianism (which, by physically negating any kind of alterity, aspired to universally affirm its own particularity) and by so-called "jihadist terrorism" (an enemy that he describes, not without Orientalist overtones[341], as impossible to negotiate or even properly fight with, since "its followers not only do not fear death, they call for it"[342]). According to him, negation should be allowed in the political sphere only as a moment of affirmation, as the "affirmative dialectic between action and reaction", which never comes to a synthesis[343].

Willingly or not, Esposito's critique of the "metaphysical machine" of negation offers a perfect philosophical counterargument to radical anger in general and to that featured in *SCUM Manifesto* in particular. While the structural realist had to rely to some extent on prudence and common sense, Esposito has provided an ontological argument that can be mobilized in support of both structural realism and the constructiveness requirement: unleashing the destructive power of negation without making it a mere tool at the service of affirmation would only pave the way to an autoimmune politics of potentially totalitarian character – and the androcidal imaginary with which Solanas played surely does not look good from this angle. In fact, Esposito may even be seen as taking a text like *SCUM* more seriously than its own author: truly negating masculinity

[339] Esposito, *Politics and Negation*, p. 7.

[340] Ibid., pp. 87-96; 108-117.

[341] It must be noted that the propaganda of the so-called Islamic State (to which Esposito implicitly refers) has successfully exploited an Orientalist imaginary to stress its purported radical otherness and, in so doing, to scare its enemies (see Jared Ahmad, *Picturing the "Hordes of Hated Barbarians": Islamic State Propaganda, (Self)Orientalism, and Strategic Self-Othering*, in "International Journal of Communication" 16, 2022, pp. 2935-2957). In fact, as was already clear from early analyses of the Islamic State and the related rise in jihadi terrorism (e.g. Patrick Cockburn, *The Rise of the Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution*, Verso, London 2015), the latter were able to emerge only thanks to several powerful sponsors and allies – a circumstance that challenges Esposito's almost eschatological claims on the purported intractability of these dramatic geopolitical phenomena.

[342] Esposito, *Politics and Negation*, pp. 4-5.

[343] Ibid., p. 9.

would inevitably imply negating the very life of currently existing males – i.e. mass killing.

Solanas would probably reply that the main issue with arguments of this kind is their lack of humour, their inability to play with several, conflicting levels of literality. *SCUM Manifesto* can indeed be read as a virtuoso variation on the politics of negation. The issue arises from its very title: what is the text in front of us? According to its title and structure, it looks like a political manifesto. However, as Janet Lyon remarked in her classical study of this literary genre, "as a manifesto, [*SCUM*] advertises at every moment its subversive negotiations of a rhetorical form of revolutionary authority by parodying, in outrageous caricature, the formal aspects of the political manifesto"[344]. What other militant would begin her denunciation of the current status quo by affirming that life under current conditions is "an utter bore?"[345]. As Solanas herself declared in a 1977 interview with *Village Voice*:

> There's no organization. It's either nothing or it's just me, depending on how you define it. I mean, I thought of it as a state of mind. In other words, women who think in a certain way are in SCUM. […] It's just a literary device. There's no organization called SCUM – there never was, and there never will be[346].

Manifestly, we are not dealing with a proper manifesto – but this is just the first layer of negation, the first leap out of the narrowness of literality. If Solanas had merely intended to joke, she would not have spent years in drafting the *Manifesto,* or decades in defending and promoting its contents. Her fundamental intuition was that – pace Esposito – negation never ceased to be related to language more than to being, to imagination more than to physically suppressing one's enemies. There is, in this connection, a close relationship between negation, humour and anger. In the previous

[344] Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes. Provocations of the Modern*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1999, p. 173.
[345] Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, p. 37.
[346] Excerpted in Fahs, *Valerie Solanas*, p. 306.

section, we mentioned that both a joke and a burst of rage can produce an interruption, a break in common sense as well as in a given emotional economy. The philosophical reason behind this similarity is that both can signal the possibility of being otherwise – that is, of negation. Even the most deterministic human scenario, in which some pregiven rule always seems to perfectly and automatically apply to actual circumstances and determining judgement therefore appears to reign uncontested, can be challenged by the mere thought (or joke) of things *not* going that way. As Paolo Virno aptly claims:

> Every joke puts into focus, in its own way, the variety of alternatives that come forth in applying a norm: rather than "continuing along the road" it is always possible "to take a side path, or go across the fields." But to take a side path, or to enter the fields, means to complete an innovative action: human "creativity" consists precisely and only in these digressions applied in the moment. Double meaning, contradiction, multiple use of the same material, word games based on homophony, semantic shuffling brought on by eccentric inference: it is sufficient to list the different techniques of humour […] in order to realize that each of these […] highlights the *aporia* and the insistent paradoxes in the relationship between rule and application[347].

Not only did Solanas write a *Manifesto* negating the very formal rules of manifestoes or showing the negative potentialities of humour itself – she also represented SCUM's anger through *negative* actions, as emerges from the twist that turns the traditional "labor force" into the "unwork force":

> [I]f a large majority of women were SCUM, they could acquire complete control of this country within a few weeks simply by withdrawing from the labor force, thereby paralyzing the entire nation. […] SCUM will become members of the unwork force, the fuck-up force; they will get jobs of various kinds and unwork. For example, SCUM salesgirls will not charge for merchandise; SCUM telephone operators will not charge for calls […]. SCUM will unwork at a job until fired, then get a new job to unwork at[348].

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[347] Paolo Virno, *Multitude. Between Innovation and Negation*, trans. by I. Bertoletti, J. Cascaito and A. Casson, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles 2008, pp. 103-104.
[348] Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, pp. 70; 72.

The notion of "unwork" shows how negative action does not correspond to laziness or passivity - it often requires energy, resourcefulness, even stubbornness. "Not-doing constitutes – Virno reminds us - a fundamental element of praxis": the doctor who remains silent in the face of the legal obligation to denounce the illegal immigrants in need of her care; the activist who even under torture refuses to tell the cops the names of her comrades - they are *acting* in the full meaning of the term[349]. Like them act the members of SCUM who, by not performing the required tasks, unwork, fuck the system, suspend the rules ensuring the reproduction of a hetero-patriarchal society. However, we know that SCUM militants only exist as a literary creation – Solanas was not trying to recruit them, let alone to turn them into the "unwork force". What was the point of her imaginative exercise, then?

The answer to this question lies in identifying the literary genre to which *SCUM Manifesto* actually belongs – a genre that encompasses negation in its very name: utopia[350]. In his monumental study of utopias, Fredric Jameson argues that it is wrong to approach them "with positive expectations, as though they offered visions of happy worlds, spaces of fulfilment and cooperation". Such canons are indeed typical of liberal political thought, from Locke to Rawls, not of the diagnoses of utopians - which, "like those of the great revolutionaries, always aim at the alleviation and elimination of the sources of exploitation and suffering, rather than at the composition of blueprints for bourgeois comfort". The utopian remedy "must at first be a fundamentally negative one, and stand as a clarion call to remove and to extirpate the specific root of all evil from which all the others spring". When utopian texts do appear to be offering blueprints, "these are however maps and plans to be read negatively, as what is to be accomplished

[349] Paolo Virno, *An Essay on Negation. For a Linguistic Anthropology* [2013], trans. by L. Chiesa, Seagull Books, Calcutta-London 2018, pp. 231-235.

[350] The most likely etymology traces it back to the Ancient Greek words *οὐ* ("not") and *τόπος* ("place"): a place which is not; a non(-yet) existent place; something which is not a place at all.

after the demolitions and the removals"[351]. Following Jameson, we can hypothesize that the reason why, as the structural realist laments, the supporters of radical anger are often not able to provide a detailed explanation of how structural injustice is going to be overcome, is that they are forced to recur to utopia – i.e. in their context, utopia is the most reasonable response to the world that they face. In fact, as Jameson notes, "most of human history has unfolded in situations of general impotence and powerlessness", when the overturning of structural injustices looked not only unlikely, but inconceivable[352]. In such political moments, anger against the status quo, coupled with the frustrating knowledge of not being able to significantly change it, make utopian imagination possible: it is precisely because we cannot directly address injustice that we resort (sometimes even just for solace) to the thought of a radically other world[353]. In this connection, Solanas was writing *SCUM* in the mid-sixties, which Jameson himself describes as a period "of great social ferment but seemingly rudderless, without any agency or reflection: reality seemed malleable, but not the system"[354] – and we already know that similar considerations can be made with reference to the history of radical feminism.

Building on these arguments, we can further hypothesize that anger acts as the dynamo starting the engine of utopia, the flame that produces a first illuminated zone within the darkness of ideology - it is the "no" of those who do not comply, the non-cooperation of the people not swearing allegiance to the regime. Without an angry outburst, focusing on the web of structural, objective violence rather than just on single episodes of

[351] Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future. The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, Verso, New York 2007, pp. 11-12.

[352] Fredric Jameson, "The Politics of Utopia", in *New Left Review* 25, 2004, p. 45.

[353] Cf. Ibid., pp. 43-44. The history of some oppressed minorities can indeed teach us not only that anger against injustice and utopia go hand in hand, but also that they can be fruitfully accompanied by humour: Jews living in Christian-dominated societies often recurred to "linguistic strategies that reinterpret[ed] Christian terms in a derogatory and dismissive way, sometimes as quite witty Hebrew puns and word-plays", while at the same time developing a prolific utopian thought from the anger generated by everyday discrimination (Cf. Larry Ray, Maria Diemling, "Arendt's 'conscious pariah' and the ambiguous figure of the subaltern", in *European Journal of Social Theory* 19(4), 2016, p. 514; Michael Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia. Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe* [1988], trans. by H. Heaney, Verso, London 2017).

[354] Jameson, "The Politics of Utopia", p. 45.

subjective violence would not be possible. A more serene mood, in fact, since it finds in reality a source of happiness or at least of indifference, will not be able to take many steps on the way to utopia, limiting itself to slightly tweaked versions of the status quo. An authentic political realism would then need both utopia and anger, because nothing is less realistic than the prediction that the future will be identical to the present, and thinking about the future requires the angry prospect of the radically other[355].

Virno's account of negation, for its part, can help us show that in Solanas there are enough resources to answer also the ontological criticism that can be built on Esposito's thought. Virno agrees with Esposito on one fundamental point: the peculiarly human[356] and potentially unlimited linguistic capacity of denying what there is opens the door to the most tragical forms of political misrecognition. The Nazi's mirror neurons may suggest to him that this Jew is as human as he is, but linguistic negation gives him the ability to state, with a deadly certainty, that "this is not a man"[357]. Nonetheless, Virno introduces a fundamental qualification, according to which language also provides a fragile yet potentially effective antidote: that public sphere where we can confront each other as equals and which is the product of a double negation - the denial of the initial lack of recognition of the one who is similar to us. Simple negation therefore coincides with unjust thought in its purest form: women are not as rational as men; Black people are not as intelligent as white people; the factory worker is not as deserving as the capitalist. The negation of negation, on the other hand, belongs to a politics opposing structural injustice (it is not true that Black people are not as intelligent as whites). In this sense, an anti-patriarchal, anti-racist or anti-capitalist politics has no positive assumption to claim - and this is not necessarily a weakness[358].

[355] Cf. Mathias Thaler, "Hope Abjuring Hope: On the Place of Utopia in Realist Political Theory", in *Political Theory* 46(5), 2018, pp. 671-697.

[356] "All human systems of communication contain a representation of denial, while no system of animal communication includes it" (Lawrence R. Horn, *A Natural History of Negation*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1989, p. xiii).

[357] Virno, *An Essay on Negation*, pp. 13-14.

[358] Ibid., pp. 17-21.

SCUM Manifesto implicitly proves this theoretical point by duplicating negation over and over: it first denies the patriarchal denial of women's equal worth; then it denies men's very right to existence, apparently fulfilling Esposito's dark predictions of totalitarian attempts to use negation once and for all (i.e. by eliminating those who are different from a particular identity and in so doing rendering the latter all-encompassing, total)[359]; nonetheless, in a further, unexpected turn Solanas' initial sex essentialism itself begins to unravel. We are all of a sudden informed that "the conflict […] is not between females and males, but between SCUM […] and Daddy's Girls"[360]. While the members of the first category are "dominant, secure, self-confident, nasty, violent, selfish, independent, proud, thrill-seeking, free-wheeling, arrogant females", the components of the second are described as "nice, passive, accepting, 'cultivated', polite, dignified, subdued, dependent, scared, mindless, insecure, approval-seeking"[361]. Daddy's Girls, furthermore, "project their deficiencies, their *maleness*, onto all females and see the female as worm"[362] - as underlined by Mavis Haut, here we become aware that *male* "may refer to persons of either sex, depending on their behavior"[363]. What should be added to this is that, at a later point, the terms referring to sex and gender identification become so messed up that they lose any referential power – when Solanas writes of "male women" towards the end of the text[364] it is impossible to understand which term indicates sex and which gender (or whether the two dimensions can at this point be separated at all)[365]. Perhaps SCUM's nasty identity is also destined to be negated at a later moment, since it does not coincide with the definition of womanhood that Solanas herself presented in some pages of the *Manifesto* - for instance where she wrote, without

[359] Esposito, *Politics and Negation*, p. 4.
[360] Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, p. 71.
[361] Ibid.
[362] Ibid., italics mine.
[363] Mavis Haut, "A salty tongue. At the margins of satire, comedy and polemic in the writing of Valerie Solanas", in *Feminist Theory* 8(1), 2007, p. 30.
[364] Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, p. 73.
[365] In fact, while writing *SCUM* Solanas lacked a clear distinction between the two, which began to be used in the US only after 1968 (see Mari Mikkola, "Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender", in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2022, §1.2, available at: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-gender/#SexDis).

a hint of sarcasm, that "a woman not only takes her identity and individuality for granted, but knows instinctively that the only wrong is to hurt others, and that the meaning of life is love"[366]. This process in which "male" and "female" features are endlessly reversed, mixed, combined, undone and redone is the opposite of the immunitarian logic observed by Esposito: difference is not sanitized or partially incorporated in some diminished form, but encouraged to thrive, no longer an index of social differentiation and injustice.

It may be countered that all the above only weakens the *Manifesto*'s political - rather than literary - value, because Solanas anarchic use of sex and gender markers makes her text more vulnerable to the constructiveness requirement: the very impossibility of telling exactly who is who may avoid a friend vs. enemy dichotomy *à la* Schmitt, but it also makes the future envisaged by the *Manifesto* more and moreat difficult to understand. Who exactly are the "women" or "females" that Solanas situates at the end of her revolutionary narrative? The violent militants of SCUM, or those who seek love as the meaning of life? Are they all people of female sex?

Once more, Jameson's account of utopia proves useful in demonstrating the sophistication of Solanas' work. According to him, utopia is most radical precisely when we cannot imagine it, when we struggle to make sense of its exact meaning. In those cases,

> Its function lies not in helping us to imagine a better future but rather in demonstrating our utter incapacity to imagine such a future [...] so as to reveal the ideological closure of the system in which we are somehow trapped and confined[367].

Solanas could not appropriately predict a non-heteropatriarchal future because the heteropatriarchal present was too asphyxiating to do so. Her hyperbolic, angry visions of an era freed of the root cause of any injustice are there just to give us a sense of how

[366] Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, p. 54.
[367] Jameson, "The Politics of Utopia", p. 46.

wide the ideological leap to be taken would need to be to envisage that scenario. Mocking those who want to defuse the political use of anger by demanding a patent of constructiveness, Solanas showed that there may be nothing more constructive than destruction.

There is, however, something more. Far from just offering an artistic anticipation of ideas later theorised by intellectuals such as Virno and Jameson, *SCUM Manifesto* goes potentially beyond their proposals, adding to them a further dose of Cynical anger.

To begin with, from its very title the *Manifesto* situates itself within the tradition that sees social critique as most effective when coming from the bottom - a tradition arguably having the Cynics among its ancestors, perhaps even as its funders. As the feminist scholar Jane Caputi remarked: "[When speaking of "scum", Solanas] really meant the lowest, most abject being that has the power to provide knowledge. I think that's a great philosophical claim"[368]. In hindsight, we can say that Solanas was formulating, in her own elliptic way, what later became the key methodological tenet of *feminist standpoint theory* (and which was already present, at least implicitly, also in the Marxist notion of *class consciousness*[369]): namely, that the best critical knowledge of a system of oppression is produced by the oppressed (or at least by those who uncompromisingly side with them, to the point of sharing their lived experience). While a Marxist like Jameson would probably be sympathetic with a view of this kind on a general level, he clearly thinks that it does not apply to utopias. According to him, all utopias (revolutionary and reactionary, those coming from above and those formulated by the "scum" of society) are shackled to the ideological subject-position(s) of their author(s)[370]: "the utopian fantasies of the poor and disadvantaged are as ideological and as laden with *ressentiment* as those of the masters and the privileged"[371]. As a

[368] Fahs, *Valerie Solanas*, p. 278 (Fahs is quoting Caputi from an interview she had with her in 2009).

[369] See Cynthia Cockburn, "Standpoint Theory", in Shahrzad Mojab (edited by), *Marxism and Feminism*, Zed Books, London 2015, pp. 331-332.

[370] Jameson, "The Politics of Utopia", pp. 46-47.

[371] Ibid, p. 50, Italics in the original.

consequence, utopias would mostly matter in their differential and unresolvable oppositions, allowing us "to grasp the moment of truth of each of them"[372].

What Jameson does not take into account, however, is the role that different utopias can play in contrasting the emotional economies sustaining structural forms of injustice. Reactionary utopias reinforce emotional economies already in place and/or with a long history (from contempt of foreigners to dismissing women's opinions), therefore – in Jameson's terms – they can point only marginally to our ideological incapacity of imagining the future: the futures they fancy tend to resemble a lot the present, or the recent past. They may indeed vehiculate and exacerbate anger and even hate, but only against those who already count as "usual suspects" – i.e. those who are discriminated under conditions of structural injustice. A utopian text like *SCUM*, on the contrary, invokes the anger of those who are not even deemed capable of such a feeling within the existent emotional landscape. As we have seen, for many people (both men and women) the *Manifesto* sounded like a revelation: feminist anger was both possible and potentially widespread. Moreover, even the utopias mobilized against structural injustice are not all the same. Those created according to the canons of high culture are always at risk of sounding dry, of producing a hiatus between the radicality of the vision expressed and the recourse to a language which, instead of communicating to the readers a break up of existing conventions, reiterates them - the disrupting force of anger could hardly fit into such a framework. *SCUM Manifesto*, for its part, openly declares war against "Great Art" and "Culture". While the first, "almost all of which […] was created by men", "is great only because male authorities have told us so", the second is attacked precisely for its complicity with political inaction:

> "Culture" provides a sop to the egos of the incompetent, a means of rationalizing passive spectating […]. Lacking faith in their ability to change anything, resigned to the status quo, they have to see beauty in turds because, so far as they can see, turds are all they'll ever have[373].

[372] Ibid. On this point, cf. also Marco Gatto, *Fredric Jameson*, Futura Editrice, Rome 2022, pp. 130-134.
[373] Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, p. 60.

Solanas' angry invective must not be read as a proof of anti-intellectualism. In fact, tirades against culture conceived as a whole often come from intellectuals themselves[374], showing that their aim is not doing without culture (as if it were possible), but moving towards a *counterculture*, a culture that negates some fundamental features of the earlier one. It is not by accident that *SCUM* mentions no other text or author, uses many "dirty" words or satirizes the very genre it pretends to belong to: Solanas deployed her signature mixture of anger and humour to make utopian *both* content and form. This perhaps allows us to make sense of the ongoing influence of *SCUM Manifesto*, which not only keeps being printed, translated and studied, but continues to inspire feminist interventions in a number of fields[375]. Among the many utopian texts somehow connected to US second-wave feminism, in the long run the *Manifesto* has been by far one the most discussed, criticized, disparaged and exalted. It would be hard to say, following Jameson, that its political and imaginary importance lies mostly in confronting it with other contemporary utopias.

Secondly, the view of negation at stake in *SCUM* is actually wider – and more politically convincing – than the one offered by Virno. According to the latter, negative actions are limited to instances of *not-doing* or *not-being-affected*[376], like "omitting, abstaining, avoiding, renouncing, disobeying, neglecting, hesitating, differing, keeping a secret,

[374] Many examples could be invoked here. I will limit myself to a wonderful passage from Adorno: "A child, fond of an innkeeper named Adam, watched him club the rats pouring out of holes in the courtyard; it was in his image that the child made its own image of the first man. That this has been forgotten, that we no longer know what we used to feel before the dogcatcher's van, is both the triumph of culture and its failure. Culture, which keeps emulating the old Adam, cannot bear to be reminded of that zone, and precisely this is not to be reconciled with the conception that culture has of itself. It abhors stench because it stinks—because, as Brecht put it in a magnificent line, its mansion is built of dogshit. Years after that line was written, Auschwitz demonstrated irrefutably that culture has failed" (Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* [1966], trans. by E.B. Ashton, Routledge, New York 2004, p. 366).

[375] To mention only two recent (and particularly original) examples: writer Andrea Long Chu borrowed from the *Manifesto* in her "On Liking Women", in *n+1* 30, 2018, pp. 47-62, an influential intervention in Trans Studies; Artist Chiara Fumai won the 2013 Furla Prize with the performance *Chiara Fumai legge Valerie Solanas* (see Francesco Urbano Ragazzi, Milovan Farronato, Andrea Bellini (eds.), *Poems I Will Never Release. Chiara Fumai 2007-2017*, Nero Editions, Rome 2021, pp. 260-269).

[376] Paolo Virno, *Dell'impotenza. La vita nell'epoca della sua paralisi frenetica*, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin 2021, p. 46.

tolerating"[377]. It would be "insane" (*dissennato*)[378] – Virno warns us – to consider a "punch" as an instance of negation. Indeed, if negation stems first of all from the peculiarly human capacity to say "no", a punch can hardly be said to have an exact linguistic meaning (it may signal a certain degree of hostility, but in itself it is far too generic to understand what exactly it would be denying). However, in Solanas' description of SCUM's rise to power we find that the notion of "unwork" refers both to negative actions in Virno's sense (e.g. refusing to do one's job) *and* to acts that clearly don't qualify as such (like looting and destroying factory equipment[379]). These last tactics seem to involve an *un-doing* that is something more than the mere *not-doing*. Indeed, the property subtraction and destruction referred to by Solanas are exactly what we would expect from angry militants like SCUM, who want to get rid of all structural injustice in a matter of weeks. Nonetheless, looting and sabotage practiced by a political group for an explicit political aim are very different from Virno's generic punch: they could be successfully articulated as one or more "no" against certain institutions, economic arrangements and power structures. On this point, Solanas is arguably closer than Virno to the Ancient Cynics: wasn't Diogenes' gesture of bringing a plucked chicken to Plato another example of a negative action with a clear linguistic meaning (in that case: "Your definition of man is clearly wrong, as it applies to this chicken, too") that had no need to be made explicit? Diogenes was surely operating in a negative mode, confuting a definition without proposing one on his own – and therefore re-opening the field for all sorts of alternatives. At the same time, he was not just omitting to use Plato's definition (*not-doing*) or being unconvinced by it (*not-being-affected*); he was *un-doing* Plato's proposal.

It is telling that, to make his account of negative actions stand, Virno is forced to counterintuitively classify acts of open resistance as passive[380]. In so doing, the person

[377] Virno, *An Essay on Negation*, p. 230.

[378] And not merely "meaningless", as his translator puts it: cf. Virno, *An Essay on Negation*, p. 13 and the original Paolo Virno, *Saggio sulla negazione. Per un'antropologia linguistica*, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin 2013, p. 16.

[379] Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, pp. 70; 72.

[380] Virno, *Dell'impotenza*, pp. 35-37.

who fights against injustice becomes more similar to a contemplative mystic than to a real political activist experiencing strong feelings – as emerges from Virno's reading of Simone Weil[381]. What a reading of the SCUM Manifesto may suggest to us, on the other hand, is to relax a bit Virno's perfect symmetry between negation and verbal language, adopting a more flexible view. There are, in fact, political acts that deploy negation in its most radical form – as the interruption of something that was deemed virtually impossible to suspend – while requiring actions that are not merely oppositional, but inventive. The instances of sabotage at the expense of highly polluting plants and pipelines recently discussed by Andreas Malm are a case in point[382]: they represent a powerful break with the (to this point, spectacularly ineffective) habitual tactics of the climate movement and force political and economic stakeholders to take a clear position in the fight against the effects of climate change. Also, by interrupting a service relying on resources ideologically thought to be endless and without alternatives, those actions provide a striking manifestation of what Virno himself calls *the potency of suspension*[383].

The militant practices described in Solanas' utopian text also highlight the connection between radical anger and a particularly important way to conceive negation – namely,

[381] Cf. Ibid., pp. 61-65.

[382] Andreas Malm, *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*, Verso, London 2021. Although perhaps a more difficult case to bring home, an analogous argument could be formulated regarding the other SCUM tactic I mentioned above, i.e. looting, on which see Vicky Osterweil, *In Defense of Looting. A Riotous History of Uncivil Action*, Bold Type Books, New York 2020.

[383] Cf. Virno, *Dell'impotenza*, p. 53. In a sense, Virno's insistence on negation as *not doing* is surprising, given his long-time affiliation with Italian Autonomous Marxism. In a key text of that tradition, Antonio Negri affirmed the fundamental equivalence between *refusal of work* (a good exemplification of Virno's negative actions) and *sabotage* itself (which, as we have seen, doesn't fit Virno's concept) precisely in terms of negation: "The refusal of work is first and foremost sabotage, strikes, direct action. Already, in this radical subjectivity, we can see the global nature of its antagonistic comprehension of the capitalist mode of production. The exploitation of labor is the foundation of the whole of capitalist society. Thus, the refusal of work does not negate one nexus of capitalist society, one aspect of capital's process of production or reproduction. Rather, in all its radicality, it negates the whole of capitalist society. So it is not by chance, then, that the capitalist response does not try to deal with the refusal of work by partial means: it has to be a global response at the level of the mode of production, in terms of restructuring. Seen from this point of view, the effects of the refusal of work exercise a direct productive action on the capitalist mode of production" (Antonio Negri, "Domination and Sabotage: On the Marxist Method of Social Transformation" [1977], in Id., *Books for Burning. Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy*, trans. by E. Emery and T.S. Murphy, Verso, London 2005, p. 270). While Negri's use of negation in this passage is loosely dialectical, it seems to me that nothing prevents an analogous argument from being formulated in the terms of Virno's non-dialectical view of negation. (It is also worth noting that Negri has progressively distanced himself from the dialectical method: see for instance Antonio Negri, "Some thoughts on the use of dialectics", in *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 3(1), 2012, pp. 3-11).

abolition. In political theory, the terms "abolition" and "abolitionism" are frequently used to define the campaigns and movements that fought for the abolition of slavery in the United States and which, afterwards, have been demanding the abolition of the prison system and the police. Abolition has been, since its inception, structural realists' worst nightmare: it seeks to prove that there are institutions so violently unjust and oppressive that just getting rid of them *is* the solution – or at the very least the beginning of one. It is often forgotten, however, that abolitionism has also been a wider political project showing that anger and negation can be consistent with the planning and implementation of new, more just institutional arrangements.

Anti-slavery abolitionists were angry people: as Benjamin Lamb-Books argues in his detailed study of their rhetorical and political tactics, a skilled recourse to anger was ultimately what made their message stick in large sectors of public opinion[384]. Their confrontational attitude towards both open supporters of slavery and those who did not take an explicit position on the issue was well known - and cost them the kind of frequent repression and retaliations that the Ancient Cynics were accustomed to[385].

Abolitionists, however, knew all too well that the end of legalized slavery did not imply the overcoming of it as a social phenomenon. In his classic analysis of the years following the formal abolition of slavery in the US (the so called "Reconstruction"), Du Bois wrote of *abolition democracy* to define "the liberal movement among both laborers and small capitalists […]" in whose eyes the only true object of the Civil War "was the abolition of slavery, and [which] was convinced that this could be thoroughly accomplished only if the emancipated Negroes became free citizens and voters"[386]. Since that movement was defeated by the convergence of white labour and capital in both North and South (regarding which Du Bois spoke, as we saw in the previous chapter, of a *public and psychological wage of whiteness*), the radical potential of

[384] Benjamin Lamb-Books, *Angry Abolitionists and the Rhetoric of Slavery. Moral Emotions in Social Movements*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2016.

[385] Cf. Joel Olson, "The Freshness of Fanaticism: The Abolitionist Defense of Zealotry", in *Perspectives on Politics* 5(4), 2007, pp. 685-701.

[386] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, p. 184.

abolitionism was still unrealized when his *Black Reconstruction in America* appeared, in 1937. What Du Bois had clear, however, was not only that, to be effective, the formal abolition of slavery should be accompanied by the enjoyment of a number of political and social rights; but also, that at the core of the abolitionist cause itself lies a utopian element requiring not merely the full inclusion of Black people into American society, but the rethinking and renewal of American society itself – i.e. the abolition of that very "color line" making racialization possible[387].

More recently, the legacy of abolition democracy has been reclaimed[388] by scholars and activist fighting against the US law enforcement complex, seen as a bastion of structural racism, as well as against structural injustice in all its manifestations. Angela Davis, who at a certain point was jailed a few cells away from Solanas (see Chapter 2 above), claims that the hyper-incarceration of Black bodies in the contemporary United States, together with the recourse to death penalty and torture by US officials at home and abroad, should be seen as remnants of slavery – and that therefore the latter can be truly abolished only through the abolition of the institutions that make possible the former[389]. With an even more visionary language, the late Joel Olson defined abolition democracy as "a politics committed to expanding freedom through the dissolution of whiteness", with the goal of making "white citizens human beings through the elimination of their racial privileges"[390]. If negation and utopia are in full sight here, what is most important for our purposes is that, nowadays, abolitionists combine utopian aspirations with concrete, empirically-grounded analyses. They cite endless data showing that the massive increase in incarceration rates was neither caused by a growth in the number of

[387] See Joel Olson's careful reading of Du Bois in his *The Abolition of White Democracy*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2004, esp. pp. 131-133.

[388] It must be noticed, however, that contemporary invocations of abolition democracy are faithful to the spirit of Du Bois' conceptualisation, more than to its letter. On this point, see Quinn Lester, "Whose democracy in which state? Abolition democracy from Angela Davis to W. E. B. Du Bois", in *Social Science Quarterly* 102, 2021, pp. 3081-3086.

[389] Angela Y. Davis, *Abolition Democracy. Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture*, Seven Stories Press, New York 2005, pp. 95ff.

[390] Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy*, p. 126.

crimes, nor it was responsible for their reduction[391]; that a zero-tolerance prison system is structurally racist and does not make the overall population safer[392]; that the police have many functions, none of which includes the protection of the average citizen's wellbeing[393].

If abolition is, by definition, a mode of negation, it is also, in the words of one of its most illustrious proponents, "about presence, not absence. It's about building life-affirming institutions"[394]. The philosophical insight behind this claim may help us to understand better the utopianism of *SCUM Manifesto*. The key idea is that we should reject the ideological view – which dates back at least to Hobbes' *state of nature*[395] - according to which beyond state institutions lie only chaos and violence. Such a vision misrepresents the present status quo as intrinsically well-ordered and, in a vicious circle, postulates the primacy of the purported current "order" over any negation of it – literally, over dis-order[396]. It also de-historicizes the contemporary law-enforcement system, which relies on quite recent institutions, including prisons themselves[397]. But abolition doesn't leave us with nothing: it produces the space for the kind of community-based, non-retributive justice that existed in some contexts before the introduction of modern prisons and that can be recreated in new forms after the demise of the carceral state – as

[391] E.g. Michael Tonry, "Why Crime Rates Are Falling Throughout the Western World", in *Crime and Justice* 43(1), 2014, pp. 1-63.

[392] See, among many others: Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Seven Stories Press, New York 2003; Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow. Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, The Free Press, New York 2010.

[393] E.g. Alex S. Vitale, *The End of Policing*, Verso, New York 2021, 2nd edition; Geo Maher, *A World Without Police. How Strong Communities Make Cops Obsolete*, Verso, New York 2021.

[394] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Making and Unmaking Mass Incarceration", talk at the University of Mississippi, Oxford, December 2019. A report of the conference can be found in Anaïs Lefèvre, "Anatomie de l'incarcération états-unienne: colloque «Making and Unmaking Mass Incarceration: the History of Mass Incarceration and the Future of Prison Abolition»", in *Transatlantica. Revue d'études américaines* 2, 2018, pp. 1-8.

[395] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. xiii. See also chap. 1 above.

[396] The word "disorder" is obtained by the union of "order" and the Ancient Greek negative prefix -δύς. Disorder is therefore "not-order" or "bad-order" (as -δύς carries both the logical and the normative meanings of negation). On this and related points I refer the reader to Cedric C. Robinson, *The Terms of Order. Political Science and the Myth of Leadership*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1980.

[397] E.g. the ground-breaking study by Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of Prison* [1975], trans. by A. Sheridan, Vintage, New York 1977.

countless small projects and initiatives already show[398]. The "absence" of structurally unjust social arrangements thus makes room for the "presence" of just institutions. Moreover, as abolitionist feminists have shown, utopian goals at the macro level and concrete involvement in everyday struggles at the micro level *cannot* be separated:

> Abolition feminism has always required a practice, an engagement – preventive community-based responses that can be implemented to both reduce the incidence of gender and sexual violence and address harm when it does happen, without calling the police. By definition, this requires revisioning, experimentation, and engagement, not simply the absence or removal of police or prisons. […] The productive tension of holding onto a radical, real, and deep vision while engaging in the messy daily practice *is* the feminist praxis[399].

Before bringing this chapter to an end, two further reflections are in order, both of which take us back to Solanas. First, we should keep in mind that there would be no current abolitionism without anger. If the case for abolition has convincingly made its appearance in the public conversation for the first time in decades, in the United States and elsewhere, it is because of what happened in 2020 in Minneapolis, after police officer Derek Chauvin cold-bloodedly killed an unarmed Black man, George Floyd, in plain daylight. On the night of May 28th, what would soon become the largest protest wave in national history[400] symbolically began when Black Lives Matter activists set the Third Police Precinct on fire – something yet unseen in the annals of the country. Protesters were mourning Floyd, raging all their anger at the racist police and taking an enemy outpost, the direct object of their fury. If racist police (mis)fire by definition,

[398] See, for example: Ejeris Dixon, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (eds.). *Beyond Survival. Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement*, AK Press, Chico 2020.

[399] Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, Beth E. Richie, *Abolition. Feminism. Now.*, Haymarket, Chicago 2022, pp. 52; 16, italics in the original. On the possibility (and the need) to put into dialogue feminist and abolitionist discourses see also Koshka Duff, "Feminism Against Crime Control: On Sexual Subordination and State Apologism", in *Historical Materialism* 26(2), 2018, pp. 123-148.

[400] Larry Buchanan, Quoctrung Bui and Jugal K. Patel, "Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in US History", in *The New York Times*, 3/7/2020.

there was some poetic justice in setting on fire the house of the misfirers. As scholar-activist Geo Maher aptly synthesized:

> To burn down a police station was one thing. To do so together, as an act of collective mourning and celebration, was another thing entirely, and it was glorious indeed. So direct was the correspondence between the violence inflicted on George Floyd and the retaliation by the protesters that, at the time, some 54 percent of Americans felt their actions were justified[401].

People had derided Solanas' utopian description of a feminist army paralyzing the nation in a few weeks through un-work and insurgent tactics; in 2020 hundreds of thousands of protesters, part of a movement launched by three queer Black women[402], gave us the feeling that she was not that wrong.

Even gender abolitionism nowadays looks more fascinating than absurd – and here comes our second reflection. As we have seen, *SCUM Manifesto* gestured towards the abolition of masculinity, while also promoting a renewed and possibly trans-inclusive notion of femininity. At times, Solanas seemed to grasp what critiques of gender binarism made clear several decades later: that heterosexuality works as a two-fold matrix[403] and that therefore one cannot radically intervene on one of its halves without also modifying the other. In this connection, a contemporary feminist current, xenofeminism, has invoked gender abolitionism as "a shorthand for the ambition to construct a society where traits currently assembled under the rubric of gender no longer furnish a grid for the asymmetric operation of power"[404]. Pace Esposito, xenofeminists

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[401] Maher, *A World Without Police*, pp. 1-2. On the events in Minneapolis, see also Charmaine Chua, "Abolition Is A Constant Struggle: Five Lessons from Minneapolis", in *Theory & Event* 23(4S), pp. 127-147.

[402] See Garza, *A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement.*

[403] "I use the term heterosexual matrix […] to designate the grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized […] to characterize a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality" (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, Abingdon 2007, 3rd edition, p. 208, n. 6).

[404] Laboria Cuboniks Collective, *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation*, 2015, available at: https://laboriacuboniks.net/manifesto/xenofeminism-a-politics-for-alienation/.

don't seek to create a unique, universal gender applicable to everybody, nor do they want people to necessarily declare themselves genderless. Rather, by rejecting "gender austerity", they advocate for "gender post-scarcity", for an "abolition through proliferation", "a *multiply* gendered world" where gender identities are no longer complicit with any form of structural injustice[405]. It may be discussed how widespread tendencies of this sort are within today's feminist movements around the world, but as xenofeminists' frequent references to radical second-wave texts (including *SCUM Manifesto*) demonstrate, those ideas keep alive a long-lasting legacy.

Solanas and Us

By any account Valerie Solanas was, like great artists and geniuses of crime, one of those figures who appear once in a million times. An artist and a criminal she was indeed, but perhaps most of all she was one of the greatest feminist killjoys of whom we have memory. To use an older terminology, she can be considered a philosopher in the tradition of the Ancient Cynics – probably the first among them to leave us a written work. But even for the standards of what may be a contemporary reactivation of Cynicism, Solanas was remarkably off scale. Only for a relatively short part of her existence she was actually able to make a somehow free life-choice and to compose a complex and somehow hermetic, but understandable discourse. For the rest of the time, she likely had very few choices and nobody who was able to both listen to her words with empathy and to capture their full meaning.

A loner by destiny and by choice, she has shown us the immense energy that radical anger can generate even in a single human being. At the same time, she has also proved that anger is not an weapon to be handled alone. In fact, joy would not be really killed if one was not in the right condition, if her cry was not loud and her laughter resounding. Sowing disquiet requires the certainty of one's own convictions, something that can

[405] Helen Hester, *Xenofeminism*, Polity, Cambridge 2018, p. 30, italics in the original.

never be fully achieved without the recognition of other killjoys, of partners in the crime of political negation - of people who feel emotionally alienated in a world that oppresses them while expecting their happiness in return. Isolation leads instead to self-referentiality, while the lack of collective political action pushes in self-destructive directions: the impossibility of projecting one's anger beyond the suffocating walls of individual experience; the persistent doubt that you have got it all wrong, that the problem is in your head and not outside. In Solanas, theory and practice did hold together, but only for a short time. Valerie, who was so proud of her guns, showed an extraordinary propensity for truth-telling, but was uncomfortable with ballistics - that of anger no less than that of firearms. Driven by an enormous and sometimes obsessive dedication, her calculations of range, target and counterfire got out of hand. If getting angry always meant going through what she went through, then it would hardly be worth the effort.

Nonetheless, every philosophical school needs a founding, legendary figure - the one who opens the path that others will walk. In this chapter, I have tried to enumerate and analyse the many reasons why Valerie Solanas should be considered our Diogenes in the search for a political philosophy of anger. Through her life and writings, she taught us that the hyperbolic character sometimes assumed by radical anger is not a sufficient motive to dismiss it; she spread light on the significant connection between anger and humour, also demonstrating how far a single, angry killjoy can go in disturbing the dominant emotional economy; she gave us the tools to expand and strengthen our theory of anger through the combined notions of utopia, negation and abolition, making us able to overcome a number of objections and argumentative difficulties. In so doing, she also pointed us towards particular instances of politically fruitful radical anger, as with abolitionism broadly conceived. Finally, she demonstrated at her own expense that radical anger doesn't mix well with personal isolation and social exclusion. Feminist theory and praxis, we saw at the beginning of this chapter, are linked to "processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation". It follows that an anger aware of the lessons of

feminism can fully work only by acting as a form of self-care, too: being angry as taking care of oneself while taking care of the world. The protagonist of the next chapter will offer us a unique exemplification of this vision.

Chapter 5. An Anger Supreme: On Malcolm X

An Unexpected Cynic

In February 1984, perhaps knowing that that could have been his last course[406], Michel Foucault gave an unexpected turn to his reflections on Ancient Cynicism. Putting aside for a moment his focus on Greece, he analysed three considerably later phenomena through which he argued that "the Cynic mode of existence" had made a sort of come-back: Christian asceticism and monasticism, revolutionary militantism in 19th and 20th century-Europe, and modern art (in particular, "the artistic life" that emerged between the 18th and the 19th century, and also the modern belief according to which art itself must be a practice of exposing, excavating and reducing reality to its basics)[407].

Early Christian martyrs ready to die for their convictions, such as Peregrinus, were also said to be Cynical philosophers – and Christian asceticism, or even the existence of Christians who were explicitly living in a Cynical way, appear in the writings of several important Christian authors, such as Augustine and Jerome[408]. Even more significantly, members of the so-called mendicant orders (e.g. the early Franciscans) stripped themselves of everything, adopted the simplest clothing and went bare foot. They did this "to call men to look to their salvation and questioning them in *diatribes* whose violence is well known"[409] – we should note Foucault's use of the term "diatribe", a word that specifically refers to the enraged speeches of Ancient Cynics. The idea of life "as a scandal of truth", moreover, seems to have been particularly lively and widespread "in all the efforts at reform which were opposed to the Church, its institutions, its increasing wealth, and its moral laxity"[410].

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[406] Frédéric Gros, "Course Context", in Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, pp. 347-349.
[407] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, pp. 180-189.
[408] Ibid., pp. 181-182.
[409] Ibid., p. 182, italics mine.
[410] Ibid., p. 183.

Also, revolutionary militantism as a "mode of life" was manifested in several guises, including what Foucault called a "style of existence", which he was especially interested in. For the revolutionary, the style of existence had "to break with the conventions, habits, and values of society" and in so doing to "manifest directly, by its visible form, its constant practice, and its immediate existence, the concrete possibility and the evident value of an *other* life, which is the true life"[411]. Foucault gave Russian nihilism and European and American anarchism as examples of this category, noting the proximity to violence implied by the styles of existence of those movements[412]. At the same time, he stressed the inevitable tension arising between "life as scandal of the truth" and the organizational needs of revolutionary collectives. Not without critical overtones, Foucault claimed that, in the case of the French Communist Party, the original Cynical injunction had been inverted by equating revolutionary life with the "implementation of accepted values, customary behaviour, and traditional schemas of conduct, as opposed to bourgeois decadence or leftist madness"[413].

Finally, by "artistic life" the French philosopher meant the "modern[414] idea that the artist's life, in the very form it takes, should constitute some kind of testimony of what art is in its truth"[415]. Among the artists sharing such a view, Foucault found particularly significant those who saw art "as the site of the irruption of what is underneath, below,

[411] Ibid., p. 184, italics in the original.

[412] "[…] terrorism, as practice of life taken to the point of dying for the truth (the bomb which kills the person who places it), appear as a sort of dramatic or frenzied taking the courage for the truth, which the Greeks and Greek philosophy laid down as one of the fundamental principles of the life of the truth, to its extreme consequence" (Ibid., p. 185). Foucault's emphasis here was not so much on the willingness to harm others, but on acting while knowing that something will likely be harmful to us – an attitude for which he had deep respect. This last point emerges in its clearest form in his description of the (surely not terrorist) Iranian masses rising against the Shah in 1979 (see Michel Foucault, "Useless to Revolt?" [1979], in Id., *Power. The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984, vol. 3*, ed. by J.D. Faubion, The New Press, New York 2001, pp. 449-453).

[413] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, p. 186.

[414] In the late Foucault, modernity must be understood more as an ethos than as a historical period (see, for instance, Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" [1978], in Id., *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984, vol. 1*, ed. by P. Rabinow, New York, The New Press, 1997, pp. 309ff.).

[415] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, p. 187.

of what in a culture has no right, or at least no possibility of expression" – his examples included Baudelaire, Flaubert, Manet, Bacon, Beckett and Burroughs[416].

Foucault would have been surprised to discover that, two decades before his lecture, one of his contemporaries had embodied all three of these neo-Cynical phenomena at once. That person was Malcolm X, born as Malcolm Little in 1925 – just one year before the French philosopher. As a minister of the Nation of Islam (henceforth the NOI), an American heretic sect loosely connected with orthodox Islam, Malcolm practiced an ascetic and austere lifestyle, following the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, the Nation's spiritual guide. He had no material possessions other than a few personal belongings, allowed himself only one meal a day, and rarely slept for more than five hours. He also avoided various types of food deemed to be impure, and neither smoked nor drank alcohol. Single transgressions of this strict code of conduct could result in temporary suspension from the NOI, while more serious violations led to expulsion, coinciding with a kind of social death (those who were expelled could no longer be contacted by NOI members). As head of the Harlem Mosque, Malcolm "held each member of his temple to the strictest standards; he would never hesitate to levy sanctions against even his closest lieutenants or to oust loyal members from the temple for weeks at a time for minor infractions, such as smoking cigarettes. He could be so demanding, his chief lieutenant […] explained, because he was hardest on himself"[417].

Malcom X could also be described as a revolutionary militant in his own right. The NOI was in fact not only a sect, but also one of the most radical anti-racist groups in the United States, whose doctrine even preached the devilish nature of white people and demanded an independent state for Black people living in the US. If Foucault spoke of revolutionary ethos as being in open conflict with the dominant conventions and values, Malcolm preached the right to self-defence for Black people who were victims of racist

[416] Ibid., p. 188.

[417] Manning Marable, *Malcolm X. A Life of Reinvention*, Viking, New York 2011, p. 121.

violence[418], was among the first to openly denounce police brutality against non-whites, and continually emphasised the colonial origins of the United States – including in the national media where he debated some of the leading opinion makers of the time. His uncompromising stance and activism meant he was subject to constant surveillance by the New York Police Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and tailed by the Secret Services far beyond the nation's borders. It also led to the infiltration of the NOI by informants belonging to a number of law enforcement agencies [419].

Malcolm X was also, if not an artist, then definitely a performer. As one of his biographers wrote: "he lived the existence of an itinerant musician, traveling constantly from city to city, standing night after night on the stage, manipulating his melodic tenor voice as an instrument. He was consciously a performer, who presented himself as the vessel for conveying the anger and impatience the black masses felt"[420]. One of the most famous and frequently requested public speakers of the 1960s, his rhetoric has sometimes been compared to jazz[421], which was among the few musical genres allowed within the NOI[422]. Also well-known are his friendship with the jazz singer Billie Holiday[423] and the spiritual and political influence that he had on the saxophonist John

[418] In this connection, Malcolm X was openly recognized as a source of inspiration by the members of the later Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (see Marable, *Malcolm X*, pp. 403; 484-485) – an organization with which Foucault himself crossed paths in the 1970s (see Jason Demers, "Unmasking Currents: Thinking Power and War with Foucault and the Black Panthers", in *Transatlantica. American Studies Journal* 2, 2022, pp. 1-25).

[419] See, for example, Clayborne Carson, *Malcolm X: The FBI File*, Skyhorse, New York 2012.

[420] Marable, *Malcolm X*, p. 480. Marable is not the only biographer to underline Malcolm's oratorial skills. Les Payne, who had the opportunity to hear Malcolm live, recalled his talent in this way: "Malcolm, who stood as erect as a Marine colonel, appeared even taller than his six-feet-three-inch frame. His voice was as raw as backwoods bourbon, and when uncorked, it was an instrument of stunning passion. His distinctive cadence, which he drilled into his ministers, had been conditioned by prison debate, and it rolled as unpredictably as mercury. Punctuated by slashing gestures and a wicked smile, the husky voice had all the range of a stage actor's: it could roar and bellow, then suddenly flutter and coo" (Les Payne, Tamara Payne, *The Dead Are Arising. The Life of Malcolm X*, Liveright, New York 2021, p. 398).

[421] "[Robin] Kelly argues that there existed an 'important intersection between the great preachers' like Malcolm and the great jazz performers, who frequently talked about playing as 'preaching'. In jazz, Kelley explains, 'there are shout choruses that are called preacher's choruses, in which you have a call-and-response. Someone like Ben Webster would play a measure, and then not play the next measure. . .When Malcolm would speak, he would speak and leave a space for response, a space for congregations of people – whether it's on the street or inside a mosque – to say, *Amen, Preach*'" (Marable, *Malcolm X*, p. 510).

[422] See Robin D.G. Kelly, "House Negroes on the Loose. Malcolm X and the Black Bourgeoisie", in *Callaloo* 21.2, 1998, pp. 419-435.

[423] Marable, *Malcolm X*., p. 261. Malcolm X, Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as Told to Alex Haley* [1965], Ballantine Books, New York 1999, pp. 131-132.

Coltrane[424]. Like a skilled actor, Malcolm was able to deeply connect with any kind of audience, from those gathered in Harlem auditoriums to Oxford University students[425]. While he adapted his language to his specific interlocutors, what remained constant was his ability to provoke whoever he was talking to, using their own style and references to challenge their convictions. It was in one of his most famous speeches that he stated that in the anti-racist movement the "music" was changing, moving from peaceful demonstrations led by religious leaders to more radical forms of protest: "[In a revolution] You don't do any singing, you're too busy swinging"[426].

In short, Malcolm X embodied all the modern ways in which Foucault believed the legacy of Ancient Cynicism had been revived. His biography, as we will see throughout this chapter, also testifies to the tension which the French philosopher detected between living a Cynical life and doing so within a group of people that was much more strictly organised than the ancient Cynical school had been. In this connection, Malcolm's inflexibility and even harshness as a religious leader were partly at odds with the libertarian portraits of Diogenes in the ancient sources. At the same time, Malcolm X moved closer to the ancient model of Cynicism than any of the figures mentioned by Foucault: an important part of his existence involved him being a wandering social and moral critic who on an almost daily basis faced people who strongly disagreed with what he had to say. The texts he left are almost exclusively transcriptions of speeches or conversations – even his famous autobiography, which he was never able to edit properly due to his assassination, largely consists of Alex Haley's reworked versions of the hours and hours of interviews he had with Malcolm[427]. He so strongly entwined

[424] Marable, *Malcolm X*, p. 465.

[425] Cf. Saladin Ambar, *Malcolm X at Oxford Union. Racial Politics in a Global Era*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014.

[426] Malcolm X, "Message to the Grassroots" [1963], in George Breitman (ed.), *Malcolm X Speaks. Selected Speeches and Statements*, Secker & Warburg, London 1966, p. 9.

[427] As Michael E. Sawyer rightly notes (*Black Minded. The Political Philosophy of Malcolm X*, Pluto, London 2020, p. 13), it would be unjust to lessen Malcolm's philosophical relevance simply because he didn't express his views through philosophical writings: "The fact of the lack of the typical written documentation that attends the examination of philosophy is one thing when the Western mind confronts the notion that Socrates never 'wrote' anything and quite another under the imposed subaltern notion that the absence of writing on the part of Black minds is predictable in that the Black is assumed to be resistant to learning and rationality".

Hadot's combination of discourse and life that it was not always possible to distinguish one from the other: Malcolm was "a man of his word" in the strongest possible sense. Furthermore, the Cynical diatribe was one of the communicative techniques most frequently used by him, in both religious and political settings. A famous episode may help us to better understand Malcolm's ability to deal with hostile criticism. At a university event, a Black professor verbally attacked him:

> One particular university's 'token-integrated' Black Ph.D. associate professor I never will forget; he got me so mad I couldn't see straight. […] He was ranting about what a 'divisive demagogue' and what a 'reverse racist' I was. I was racking my head, to spear that fool; finally I held up my hand, and he stopped. 'Do you know what white racists call black PhDs?' He said something like, 'I believe that I happen not to be aware of that' – you know, one of these ultra-proper-talking Negroes [sic]. And I laid the word down on him, loud: 'Ni**er!'[428]

This passage clearly shows that anger was a key feature of Malcolm X's Cynical attitude. As we saw in Chapter 1, the FBI had labelled him a schizophrenic precisely in order to pathologise his angry rhetoric. In his role as minister of the local mosque, Malcolm wrote a regular column in the Harlem newspaper *Amsterdam News* tellingly entitled "God's Angry Man", which he used to spread Elijah Muhammad's jeremiads against white people[429]. Derogatorily called "the angriest Negro in America", Malcolm wore that label as a badge of honour: "I wouldn't deny that charge. […] I *believe* in anger"[430].

If his anger was so obvious as to be undeniable, for a long time even those who wanted to see it in a positive light seemed only able to do so at the cost of smoothing its edges. Thus, Cornel West wrote that "Malcolm X articulated black rage in a manner unprecedented in American history", only to add that such a feeling was not directed against whites, but rather towards African Americans themselves, to make them feel

[428] Malcolm X, Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 290.
[429] Marable, *Malcolm X*, p. 130.
[430] Malcolm X, Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 373.

"the love [for them] that motivated that rage"[431]. Avoiding such sentimentality, bell hooks instead emphasised that there was a strong sense of justice at the root of Malcolm's anger and, even more relevant to our research, that it was anger which allowed him to constantly evolve throughout his life as a political leader and as a human being[432]. Faithful to his belief that flexibility "must go hand in hand with every form of intelligent search for truth", Malcolm defined his life as "a chronology of changes"[433]. While the Ancient Cynics constantly tested themselves with the aim of achieving a quantitative, almost muscular enhancement of their wisdom, Malcolm experienced qualitatively spectacular transformations that could lead to partial reversals without ever undermining the feeling that he was a man of unbreakable consistency. Indeed, he was consistent in relentlessly challenging himself.

However, Malcolm X also challenged the trajectory of Cynicism formulated by Foucault or by other Western philosophers. Although he made occasional references to Ancient Greek culture, Malcolm was more interested in Oriental though[434] – as we shall see, his life-changing travels were to Mecca and North Africa, not to the acropolis in Athens. It is important to note that Hadot's notion of a "philosophical life" was not referred exclusively to the so-called Western thought[435] – and that a rediscovery of Cynicism as a way of doing philosophy from the bottom up (or from scum, as Solanas would say) probably made more sense in Malcolm X's Harlem than in Foucault's Paris. While in the 1980s Foucault was perhaps trying to conceive a "style of existence" grounded in the present that nevertheless remained true to the Cynical legacy, twenty years earlier Malcolm X had already demonstrated that such a life was in fact possible – and that it wasn't necessary to know who Diogenes was to practice it.

In this chapter, I will explain how Malcolm X anticipated, actualized and radicalized several ideas recurring in the thought of the late Foucault, combining them in an original

[431] Cornel West, *Race Matters*, Beacon Press, Boston 2001, 2nd edition, pp. 95-96.
[432] bell hooks, *Killing Rage. Ending Racism*, Henry Holt, New York 1995, pp. 18-19.
[433] Malcolm X, Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, pp. 346-347.
[434] Ibid., p. 182.
[435] Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 278-279.

philosophy of anger. In particular, I will argue that Malcolm showed us how to turn anger against structural injustice into a form of care for oneself as well as for others. For the sake of argumentative clarity, I will proceed chronologically: in the next section I will follow Malcolm from his years in jail to the end of his experience as a NOI minister; and in that which follows I will deal with his last and perhaps most impressive year.

Anger as Care of the Self

Both in his lectures and in his published works of the 1980s, Michel Foucault analyzed at length the ancient notion of "care of the self" (*ἐπιμέλεια ἑαυτοῦ* in ancient Greek, *cura sui* in Latin), aiming to show that this concept had a deeper influence within Western thought on the relationship between subjectivity and truth than the considerably more famous "know thyself" (*γνῶθι σεαυτόν*) – the maxim once inscribed in the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo in Delphi[436]. For the purposes of this chapter, I will highlight four essential features of Foucault's view on the care of the self.

First, for the ancient Greeks and the Romans, taking care of oneself, although depending on some forms of knowledge (from the rules of gymnastics to those of meditation) was most of all an activity, a *praxis*[437]. Second, it included a wide array of practices:

> Taking care of oneself is not a rest cure. There is the care of the body to consider, health regimens, physical exercises without overexertion, the carefully measured satisfaction of needs. There are the meditations, the readings, the notes that one takes on books or on the conversations one has heard, notes that one reads again later, the recollection of truths that one knows already but that need to be more fully adapted to one's own life[438].

[436] See e.g. Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, pp. 2-3.
[437] Foucault, *The Care of the Self* [1984], trans. by R. Hurley, Pantheon Books, New York 1986, p. 58.
[438] Ibid., p. 51.

Third, the care of the self was "not an exercise in solitude, but a true social practice"[439]: it could involve a relationship with a spiritual guide or a preceptor, the exchange of letters with friends sharing an interest in *ἐπιμέλεια*, attending a school or being a member of a sect. Finally, the care of the self was not for everybody: it required that the person was able to make free use of their existence, did not have any pressing material needs and had a substantial amount of time at their disposal – all of which were quite rare[440]. In the Greek world it was mainly an aristocratic privilege: the eponymous protagonist of Plato's *Alcibiades* – a text that Foucault analyzes at length – followed Socrates' teachings on *ἐπιμέλεια* because he was part of a powerful family and was expected to become a political leader. In order to take care of the city, Alcibiades had first to learn how to take care of himself[441]. In Rome, the care of the self became more popular, to the point that we can speak of a "cultivation of the self"[442] present in several social quarters – but it still remained the prerogative of a small fraction of the population, of those who were believed to possess the necessary spiritual and behavioral qualities[443].
The young Malcolm X was as far from the ideal practitioner of the care of the self as it was possible to get. A Black man in a racist country, fatherless, poor, scarcely educated, at twenty he was already involved in a number of criminal activities, from drug dealing (he was also an addict) to pimping, from illegal gambling to burglaries. He was then arrested and sentenced to ten years in one of toughest prisons in the US – more for having a married white woman as a lover and accomplice than for the gravity of his crimes. His reaction consisted in "fits of outrage and alienation": Malcolm spent his first months in prison swearing and cursing loudly, so much so that the other inmates nicknamed him 'Satan'[444]. His anger was all-encompassing and uncontrolled – invoking

[439] Ibid.
[440] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, pp. 112-113.
[441] Ibid., pp. 32-34.
[442] Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, pp. 44-45.
[443] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, pp. 118-119.
[444] Malcolm X, Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 156; Marable, *Malcolm X*, p. 71.

a notion I introduced in Chapter 2, it was totally lacking any *ballistics*, aiming instead at random targets.

It was in these unfavorable circumstances that Malcolm X began, perhaps by chance, to take care of himself. Among the inmates in his branch was a Black man of considerable charisma and culture, John Elton Bembry[445], who "was known as the library's best customer" and "had always taken charge of any conversation he was in"[446]. It was under Bembry's encouragement and supervision that Malcolm enrolled in correspondence courses and began to attend the library, thus managing to obtain a transfer to a prison with better conditions[447]. It may be that he took these first steps on the path to learning in order to be reassigned to another penitentiary, but they quickly became more significant, a process capable of channeling the powerful anger that he had at first vented chaotically.

Norfolk, his new prison, had one of the best prison libraries in the country and an ambitious educational program for inmates, with several college-level courses taught by university professors from the Boston area[448]. Malcolm took to reading all sorts of books voraciously, eventually memorising an entire dictionary to expand his vocabulary. During the following years, which he later described as the "busiest" of his life, he lived spending all day and some of the night reading: "from then until I left that prison, in every free moment I had, if I was not reading in the library, I was reading on my bunk", keeping it going even when the lights went off[449]. His reading list was soon filled with books on the Atlantic slave trade, the genocide of Native-Americans, and racism and colonialism. He read, among others, W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter J. Woodson, J.A. Rogers, Gandhi, and learnt of John Brown and Nat Turner. He discovered that the racist

[445] The most detailed published account of Elton Bembry was written by one of his nephews: Jerry Bembry, "The untold story of the inmate who helped shape Malcolm X's future", in *Andscape*, 20/2/2020.

[446] Malcolm X, Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, pp. 157; 174.

[447] Although the *Autobiography* underlines Bembry's positive influence on Malcolm's educational and human development, the extent of such influence is still debated among historians (see Jed B. Tucker, "Malcolm X, the Prison Years: The Relentless Pursuit of Formal Education", in *The Journal of African American History* 102(2), 2017, pp. 198-201).

[448] Ibid., pp. 194-198.

[449] Malcolm X, Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, pp. 173-176.

discrimination he had experienced all his life had a history[450]. Even when dealing with subjects not immediately related to the conditions of Black people in the United States (he also studied Latin and read German philosophy, to name but a few), he was always driven by a sense of urgency:

> I certainly wasn't seeking any degree, the way a college confers a status symbol upon its students. My homemade education gave me, with every additional book that I read, a little bit more sensitivity to the deafness, dumbness, and blindness that was afflicting the black race in America. […] History has been so "whitened" by the white man that even the black professors have known little more than the most ignorant black man about the talents and rich civilizations and cultures of the black man of millenniums ago[451].

Here we can already already glimpse a radicalization of the ancient care of the self. Malcolm X made self-education the kind of ascetic, regular, and increasingly ambitious exercise that the Ancients practiced as *ἐπιμέλεια*. Moreover, he did not do it in a solitary manner: he took advantage of the courses offered in prison and used to study with a group of other inmates[452]. However, the fact of being an extremely underprivileged individual (a Black convicted felon with no money and no formal education) gave his activity an agonistic dimension that was largely foreign to the care of the self described by Foucault. Whereas the latter was mainly characterized by the search for measure and moderation, Malcolm X was instead trying to push as many boundaries as possible in the shortest time, studying up to fifteen hours a day, while beginning to address his anger with increasing precision. In his own words: "My reading had my mind like steam under pressure. Some way, I had to start telling the white man about himself to his face"[453]. It was in looking for a way to let off steam that he discovered what was probably the closest thing to Cynical diatribe in the US in the 1940s.

[450] Marable, *Malcolm X*, p. 91.
[451] Malcolm X, Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, pp. 182; 184.
[452] Tucker, "Malcolm X, the Prison Years", pp. 199-200.
[453] Malcolm X, Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 187.

He took part in Norfolk Prison Colony's flagship prisoner debating program, which was already well-established in the 1930s [454]. Weekly debates, preceded by four or five practice sessions, were held between inmate teams, while a team composed of the best inmates regularly confronted debaters coming from some of the most prestigious universities: from the mid-1930s to the 1950s the "Norfolk Debaters" competed against visiting teams from, among others, Harvard, Yale, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Columbia, Princeton, Boston University, Oxford, Cambridge, and McGill – and more often than not, they won[455]. These debates provided an especially significant forum for African Americans, whose access to education outside prison was severely compromised by segregation and who had very few opportunities to publicly engage with white 'adversaries' as equals[456]. Malcolm X was electrified by his early experiences in debating, and soon found strategies to move virtually any discussion onto the terrain of politics and racism:

> I will tell you that, right there, in the prison, debating, speaking to a crowd, was as exhilarating to me as the discovery of knowledge through reading had been. Standing up there, the faces looking up at me, things in my head coming out of my mouth, while my brain searched for the next best thing to follow what I was saying, and if I could sway them to my side by handling it right, then I had won the debate – once my feet got wet, I was gone on debating. […] I'd put myself in my opponent's place and decide how I'd try to win if I had the other side; and then I'd figure a way to knock down those points. And if there was any way in the world, I'd work into my speech the devilishness of the white man[457].

His rhetorical skills made him popular and showed him he was able to confront privileged white opponents (the members of the university teams) on an equal footing. Moreover, as Robert James Branham has shown, Malcolm's ability "to put [himself] in [his] opponent's place" would later become a hallmark of his public speaking career: by

[454] Robert James Branham, "'I Was Gone on Debating': Malcolm X's Prison Debates and Public Confrontations", in *Argumentation and Advocacy* 31:3, 1995, p. 120.
[455] Tucker, "Malcolm X, the Prison Years", p. 205.
[456] Robert James Branham, "'I Was Gone on Debating'", pp. 119-120.
[457] Malcolm X, Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, pp. 187-188.

anticipating and rebutting counter arguments in a harsh, and sometimes spectacular, manner, he always seemed to be able to lead the conversation[458].

What Branham didn't notice is that, in both form and content, Malcolm's 'come-backs' were perfect examples of the Cynical diatribe. In Chapters 3 and 4 I mentioned Diogenes' performative refutation of Plato's definition of man, and noted that it represented a significant instance of negative thinking. If we now consider its implicit formal structure (I. If Plato's definition is correct, then II. this plucked chicken is a man; but since III. this plucked chicken is clearly not a man, then IV. Plato's definition is bogus) we see that Diogenes was using a typical *reductio ad absurdum* - i.e. an argumentative strategy which appeals to the logically implied, absurd consequences of a hypothetical proposition in order to refute it. One of Malcolm's great rhetorical insights[459] was that *reductio ad absurdum* works even better in a dialogical format: if your adversary introduces by herself a flawed definition, your 'come-back' will look even stronger. Malcolm X particularly excelled at that specific type of *reduction ad absurdum* that goes under the name of *refutational analogy*: "if one accepts a certain way of thinking, one should also accept a comparable, but absurd way of thinking. And since one does not accept the absurd idea, one cannot accept the initial idea"[460].

Consider the following 1961 televised exchange. When showing all his skepticism in the face of the slow process of "racial integration", Malcolm prompted his interlocutor, the great African American lawyer Constance Baker Motley, to ask him: "You recognize, don't you, that they [whites] have made some progress and that there has been greater dignity accorded the American Negro? We don't disagree on that, do we?". Malcolm – remember that Cynical diatribe "works by surprise"[461] – then replied with

[458] Branham, "'I Was Gone on Debating'", p. 129.

[459] An insight with solid cognitive and philosophical grounding, as shown in Catarina Dutilh Novaes, "Reductio ad absurdum from a dialogical perspective", in *Philosophical Studies* 173, 2016, pp. 2605-2628.

[460] Henrike Jansen, "Refuting a Standpoint by Appealing to Its Outcomes: *Reductio ad Absurdum vs*. Argument from Consequences", in *Informal Logic* 27(3), 2007, p. 253.

[461] Kennedy, "Cynic Rhetoric", p. 39. Alternatively, we could describe the exchange above as an instance of what Foucault called "Cynical provocative dialogue" (Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* [1983], ed. by J. Pearson, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles 2001, pp. 122-33). However, as a short cycle of lectures *Fearless Speech* sounds at times elliptic and even simplistic – as suggested by the fact that Foucault never mentioned the Cynical "diatribe" in those lectures. The

the refutational analogy he had been waiting to drop, and that he knew would shock Baker Motley:

As a lawyer, I'm sure you'll agree that if you put a man in prison illegally and unjustly, one who has not committed a crime, and after putting him there you keep him in solitary confinement, it's doubly cruel. Now if you let him out of solitary into the regular prison yard, you can call that progress if you want, but the man was not supposed to be put in prison in the first place. Now you have 20 million black people in America who are begging for some kind of recognition as human beings and the average white man today thinks we're making progress[462].

In the above passage he uses one of the debate tactics that he had practiced in Norfolk, but it was, however, his Cynical strategy (what Branham called his "meta-topic") that made Malcolm such a formidable orator:

The stated topic for a debate with Malcolm X might be "Integration vs. Separation", but the meta-topic might better be stated as "Who best expresses Black anger, frustration, pride and power?". Malcolm X was highly adept at debating the individual issues in an exchange, but he was unmatched when it came to this larger question[463].

Malcolm transformed his own anger into something bigger, using it to fuel his public speaking, thus becoming the spokesperson for all angry Black Americans – and there were many of them. Rather than avoiding expressing strong feelings and suggesting the same to his followers – as the ancient practitioners of the care of the self would have done[464] – he was passionately inciting African Americans to let their anger speak.
But how did he move from being a prison debater to becoming a national anti-racist icon? While imprisoned, Malcolm X not only saw the possibilities of education and was

classification of Cynical parrhesia that he suggested there (Ibid., p. 119) is absent from his longer courses at the Collège de France, whereas diatribe is mentioned several times in his later *The Courage of Truth* (pp. 182; 279; 314).

[462] Quoted in Branham, "'I Was Gone on Debating'", p. 129.

[463] Ibid., p. 128.

[464] A good example is here provided by Seneca, for instance in his *De Ira* (45 a.D.).

introduced to public speaking, but also encountered and began adhering to the Nation of Islam. In fact, these three things occurred almost simultaneously and seemed to complement each other. The NOI's message, which reached Malcolm through the visits and letters of his relatives, revolved around the conviction that "the white man is the devil" and Black people the chosen race that the former had discriminated against out of envy[465].

On the other hand, the NOI's hold on Malcolm was only possible because, although small in size, it had become far more structured and credible than it had been in previous decades. Elijah Muhammad, a humble man of poor health who had lived in poverty for most of his life, had reinvented himself in the unprecedented role of prophet after the sudden disappearance of the founder of the NOI, a mysterious man of light complexion who claimed to come from Mecca, in Saudi Arabia, and was known within the Nation as W.D. Fard. His actual name, as Les and Tamara Payne have conclusively demonstrated after decades of speculation, was Wallace Dodd and he was probably born in New Zealand. He had served time in San Quentin for selling narcotics and the FBI considered him a confidence man[466]. Despite his Caucasian appearance, he gathered a growing number of African Americans from the lowest social strata around himself, pretending to be a prophet sent by Allah to proclaim a cult that mixed elements of Shiite Islam, Christian heresies and ufology, among other things, in order to claim that white people were demons who would sooner or later be exterminated. When Dodd vanished (most likely because the police had banned him from the city)[467], Muhammad did not suddenly become a shrewd religious leader, but went through a series of missteps (think of the prophecy that Allah would wipe out all white people by the end of 1935), after which he was nonetheless able to rebuild his image as increasingly authoritative. By the

[465] NOI's doctrine clearly relied on the tactical inversion of some Judeo-Christian master narratives. On this topic, see Gabriel A. Acevedo, James Ordner and Miriam Thompson, "Narrative inversion as a tactical framing device. The ideological origins of the Nation of Islam", in *Narrative Inquiry* 20(1), 2010, pp. 124-152.

[466] Les Payne, Tamara Payne, *The Dead Are Arising*, pp. 253-257.

[467] Ibid., p. 255.

time he wrote to Malcolm X in jail, urging him to persevere on the path to conversion, he had the tone and confidence of a venerable master [468].

Malcolm began writing to Muhammad feverishly, almost daily, seeking his counsel on topics ranging from prayer to diet. Here we find another component of the peculiar care of the self practiced by Malcolm: while maintaining an epistolary dialogue with a spiritual guide was frequently a part of ancient *ἐπιμέλεια*, what Muhammad promised was a means of combining an ascetic conduct (an austere dress code, a daily prayer routine, numerous duties towards the NOI community, etc.) with a potentially explosive anti-racist anger. Moreover, the "Messenger" (as he was called by his devotees) sensed the potential that Malcolm had in the context of the Nation: his intelligence, youth and years spent at the margins of the law[469] would help him to attract many poor African American proselytes.

After Malcolm's early release from prison in 1952, he rapidly became the NOI's raising star. His resourcefulness, combined with the sect's meagre theological apparatus, soon made him a minister – he was assigned to a mosque situated in Harlem, whose streets he had known as a young criminal. Whenever Malcolm could, he visited the Messenger in the latter's Chicago headquarters, trying to glean as much as possible from him. Muhammad could not travel much due to ill health, and was a mediocre speaker, but through Malcolm X as the NOI's main emissary his message soon reached thousands of African Americans all over the country, with many converting to the NOI. Malcolm also trained a new generation of ministers that was younger and more committed than the previous one, thus bringing the NOI to the attention of both the media and the authorities.

As long as Malcolm had faith in Muhammad, he was able to act both as a successful preacher throughout the US and as the charismatic face of the Nation in the media. In

[468] On Elijah Muhammad and his relationship with "Fard" I follow Karl Evanzz, *The Messenger. The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad*, Vintage, New York 2001, chaps. 4-7.

[469] Between the 1950s and the 1960s, the NOI exercised a particular appeal on African American inmates: see Zoe Colley, "'All America Is a Prison': The Nation of Islam and the Politicization of African American Prisoners", in *Journal of American Studies* 48(2), 2014, pp. 393-415.

order to do so, he had to figure out effective ways to present those features in the NOI's doctrine that were particularly hard to sell. On the religious level, Muhammad's claim that there was no heavenly life after death[470] was too discomforting to many prospective believers to be taken seriously, and it isolated the Messenger from virtually every other spiritual leader in the country. From a political point of view, the NOI's strategy could look both too utopian (as it demanded the creation of a separate state for African Americans) and too conservative (apart from this rather sterile campaign for a new state, no further political involvement was allowed). Put together, these two elements looked even weaker: if there was to be no racial justice in another world, then it had to be pursued in this one, during our lifetimes – this seems to lend itself better to calls to direct action than to some vague separatist aspiration. For some years, Malcolm X was able to reduce these contradictions by stressing the political component of Muhammad's message[471] in terms of Black pride and of the right of self-defense against racist aggression – it was also for this reason that the Nation maintained a paramilitary (though unarmed) branch, the 'Fruit of Islam'.

However, in the 1960s the personal relationship between Malcolm and Muhammad began to deteriorate. Looking again to the notion of *ἐπιμέλεια* will help us understand why that happened.

In the ancient model of the care of the self, the master or spiritual guide does not aim to increase his power over his disciple or to gain his unwavering obedience. Rather, "the master is the person who cares about the subject's care for himself, and who finds in his love for his disciple the possibility of caring for the disciple's care for himself"[472]. The goal of the master, in other words, is to increase the disciple's autonomy, not constrain it. At first, Malcolm felt that Muhammad acted as a good master: he welcomed him into the NOI, shared his supposed wisdom with him, trusted him to perform more and more important functions within the sect – he even let Malcolm act as his only official

[470] See Evanzz, *The Messenger*, Epilogue and Les Payne, Tamara Payne, *The Dead Are Arising*, p. 314.
[471] E.g. Marable, *Malcolm X*, p. 124.
[472] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 59.

spokesperson. In return, Muhammad received "rock solid" loyalty: "Minister Malcolm was considered throughout the entire NOI as the most ascetic young zealot for Allah imaginable"[473]. The drug dealer once known as 'Satan' had become a perfect devotee – and Elijah had given a direction to Malcolm's anger against white supremacy.

Nonetheless, as time went by the Messenger was not ready to recognize that his disciple's apprenticeship was over. On the contrary, he insisted on receiving recordings of Malcolm's speeches to check their compliance with the NOI's doctrine, had a veto over whether he could release interviews or statements, and could forbid him from mentioning certain topics in public[474]. Muhammad's centralizing tendencies were even worsened, in Malcolm's eyes, by the Messenger's declining interest in the political elements of his doctrine. With the considerable increase in NOI's popularity due to Malcolm X's tireless proselytism, the Nation was creating a network of thriving businesses completely run by its followers and substantial flows of money were redirected to the Chicago headquarters, to pay for the expensive lifestyle of Muhammad's family. With a growing economic empire to defend, Elijah Muhammad was less and less inclined to expose the Nation politically, or to give Malcolm the room to do so[475].

Further signs of Muhammad's failure to act as a true master of *ἐπιμέλεια* were his lack of transparency and his intrusive control over Malcolm X's private life. In Chapter 3, we mentioned the Cynics' fearless critical speech, which dared to speak the truth even at the cost of endangering the speaker's life. The ancient Greeks called this kind of speech *parrhesia* – and we will see shortly how Malcolm himself can be described as practicing parrhesia in this way. However, with time the notion of parrhesia acquired many nuances and, especially in Rome, was also employed to describe the modality in which the master of *ἐπιμέλεια* addressed his disciple and the frankness of the communication between them: "[According to Philodemus, a Greek philosopher who

[473] Les Payne, Tamara Payne, *The Dead Are Arising*, pp. 277-278.
[474] Marable, *Malcolm X*, pp. 187-188; 202; 269.
[475] Ibid., p. 195.

lived in Rome in the 1st century B.C.]. Parrhesia is opening the heart, the need for the two partners to conceal nothing of what they think from each other and to speak to each other frankly"[476]. Malcolm X, who in the meantime had married fellow NOI member Betty Shabazz, rigorously followed that principle – revealing to Muhammad even the most intimate details of his difficult marital life. The Messenger, on the other hand, did not disclose that his own private life was far from consistent with his teachings [477]. Paradoxical as it may seem, Muhammad, who considered Christianity as inherently complicit in racial discrimination, established a relationship with his best-known disciple that moved away from the care of the self ideal to increasingly resemble Christian confession – in which the duty to tell the truth about oneself is completely unilateral. While in the ancient, pagan model of the care of the self the master encouraged his disciples to practice a moment of spiritual self-examination at the end of the day, this activity took place in solitude and it "[did] not focus, as if in imitation of the judicial procedure, on 'infractions'", nor did it lead to "a verdict of guilty or to decisions of self-castigation"[478]. Self-examination was future-oriented, it was "focused on the organization of new, more rational, more apt, and more certain schemas of conduct"[479]. Christian confession, on the other hand, made eternal salvation dependent on the confessant's "obligation of truth-telling about [themselves]" – an obligation whose very existence presupposed the presence of a confessor who had to judge whether it was fulfilled or not[480]. This practice was inevitably oriented toward past infractions,

[476] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 137. It was the practice of a parrhesia so conceived which enabled the care of the self to increase the disciple's freedom and autonomy: "The final aim of parrhesia is not to keep the person to whom one speaks dependent upon the person who speaks […]. The objective of parrhesia is to act so that at a given moment the person to whom one is speaking finds himself in a situation in which he no longer needs the other's discourse" (Ibid., p. 379).

[477] Marable, *Malcolm X*, pp. 149-150.

[478] Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, p. 62.

[479] Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, p. 245.

[480] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, pp. 363-364. We have to keep in mind that Christian confession was so important for Foucault because it was the matrix of a form of power which is still with us: "The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public and in private, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves; one admits to

its "function [being] the exploration of the secrets of the heart, the mysteries of the heart in which the roots of sin are to be found"[481]. Like a Christian confessor, Muhammad pressed Malcolm to reveal his most intimate thoughts and his slightest mistakes, but did not open himself up to him in return.

As a consequence, Malcolm X's anger started to lose a clear purpose, with something similar happening to many other followers of NOI, for instance to the members of the Fruit of Islam. Trained as a sort of militia, they were constantly exposed to the Messenger's tirades against "white devils", but he prohibited them virtually any use of violence, even in a defensive fashion, against white people. Not surprisingly, the members of the Fruit of Islam began to offload their rage on those fellow devotees who were found guilty of violating the extremely strict moral code of the Nation – you could be suspended by the NOI and even beaten up by members of the Fruit for something as menial as smoking tobacco[482].

In his capacity as a NOI minister and spokesperson, Malcolm was often called on to practice parrhesia in its Cynical version [483]. Among other things, he had to tell Black Americans that they had no chance of integration in a society dominated by white people. He preached a code of moral conduct that was difficult to follow and easy to breach, and attacked white liberals for their hypocrisy on racial issues. However, we know from Chapter 3 that Cynical parrhesia can only work if one is ready to stand by the truth of one's own words and to act as a living example of them. While this was

oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell to anyone else, the things people write books about. One confesses – is forced to confess. […] Western man has become a confessing animal" (Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction* [1976], trans. by R. Hurley, Pantheon Books, New York 1978, p. 59).

[481] Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, p. 246.

[482] Marable, *Malcolm X*, p. 253.

[483] An early attempt to read Malcolm X' s career as a public speaker through the lens of Foucauldian parrhesia was made in David R. Novak, "Engaging Parrhesia in a Democracy: Malcolm X as a Truth-teller", in *Southern Communication Journal* 71(1), 2006, pp. 25-43. However, Novak's analysis is problematic for two reasons. First, at the time he had access only to a small portion of Foucault's writings on parrhesia and none of the most authoritative biographies of Malcolm X had been published. Second, Novak's schematic division of Malcolm's life (absence of parrhesia during his NOI tenure, imperfect parrhesia in the aftermath of his exclusion from NOI, full parrhesia after his long travels in Africa and the Middle East) is very unconvincing once a sufficient number of Malcolm's speeches are taken into account.

already difficult enough due to Muhammad's obsession with control, a series of events would completely prevent Malcolm X from acting as a παρρησιαστής.

First, Malcolm discovered that the Messenger had used his considerable influence over a number of young NOI women to force them to have sex with him. Some of those women had even become pregnant and were quickly expelled from the Nation on indecency charges – as they could not reveal whom they had conceived their children with. When Malcolm pressed Elijah about his behavior, the latter did not even try to deny or minimize his actions – he just told his disciple to keep them to himself and to figure out some religious explanation for them should they become public [484]. Discovering Muhammad's duplicity brought Malcolm to the verge of an identity crisis: the man whose prescriptions and orders he had always followed out of faith, even when not fully agreeing with them, had lost all credibility. Their entire relationship of master and disciple started to seem farcical. It became clear that Elijah never had any intention of reciprocating Malcolm's complete frankness. Malcolm's role as a preacher and speaker suffered from this experience – taking a first step away from parrhesia, he started to avoid certain topics: "I spoke less and less of religion. I taught social doctrine to Muslims, and current events, and politics. I stayed wholly off the subject of morality. And the reason for this was that my faith had been shaken in a way that I can never fully describe"[485].

Whereas this first discovery already threatened Malcolm X's ability to preach a doctrine that even its author greatly disrespected, several others irreparably compromised Muhammad's fitness as a political guide. In hindsight the Messenger's idea of a new state for Black people started to resemble something more like the later, disastrous experiment of Rajneeshpuram[486] than decolonization or even nationalism: rather than

[484] Ibid., 233-235.

[485] Malcolm X, Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, pp. 300-301.

[486] Rajneeshpuram was the name of a religious community situated in Wasco County, Oregon, from 1981 to 1985. It was an attempt to build a separate, independent city in a scarcely populated area of the United States. It was founded by the Indian guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and a group of his followers. Tensions with the local authorities and population brought some members of the community to carry out a bioterror attack and even plot a series of murders – which were

obtaining an actual state for African Americans, Muhammad's plan turned out to be limited to the constitution of a small NOI enclave over which he would have absolute power. Even worse, in order to realize this project, he tried to strike a deal with the only organization with a comparable interest in Black separatism, although for opposite reasons: the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). That was a fatal blow for Malcolm[487], whose mother had been attacked by Klansmen when she was pregnant with him (and whose father was possibly killed by the KKK[488]).

A year and half later, the Messenger's commitment to self-defense also proved to be merely opportunistic. In Los Angeles, an altercation had broken out between police officers and members of the Nation. The confrontation was probably triggered by the police themselves, who considered NOI members a threat to the community. In the violent scuffle that followed, several gunshots were fired and a friend of Malcolm, Ronald Stokes, who was advancing with hands above his head to show his intention to surrender, was fatally shot in the back by a policeman. Frustrated for too long, Malcolm X's anger re-emerged in all its intensity: his first reaction was to put together a commando for retaliation against Los Angeles' police. Since Muhammad expressed his opposition to any recourse to physical violence, Malcolm proposed the organization of a united, anti-racist front against police abuse, but Muhammad again used his power of veto. In a dramatic inversion of parrhesia, Malcolm was forced to report Muhammad's take on the murder to his Harlem followers: "Stokes had died from weakness, because he had attempted to surrender to the police"[489]. Malcolm X thus found himself in the

luckily thwarted. See Carl Abbott, "Utopia and Bureaucracy: The Fall of Rajneeshpuram, Oregon", in *Pacific Historical Review* 59(1), 1990, pp. 77-103.

[487] Ibid., chap. 13, esp. pp. 323-324; 331; 335-337; 339-340; 370-374.

[488] Malcolm's father, Earl Little, was fatally run over by a streetcar in Lansing, Michigan, in 1931. While the circumstances of his death remain unclear, it is known that he had had issues with the Ku Klux Klan and other white-supremacist groups (one of them even burnt down his family's house in 1929). Malcolm always believed, despite the lack of sufficient evidence, that his father was actually assassinated by the KKK (see Les Payne, Tamara Payne, *The Dead Are Arising*, pp. 83-94).

[489] Marable, *Malcolm X*, p. 209. On Malcolm's view of police violence, Michael E. Sawyer (*Black Minded*, p. 68) makes an interesting insight: "Malcolm X's focus, to the point of fracturing his relationship with the Nation of Islam, on the societal ill of police violence, is to recognize the coercive force's role in preventing the reconstruction of the physical space of the Black body as a positive, self-referential political space that can be included in the calculation of a political and social project that recognizes the same body as an accepted and acceptable political actor".

same condition he had experienced at the beginning of his prison term: he was full of anger, and did not know what to do with it.

Malcolm's break from Muhammad became explicit in the aftermath of President Kennedy's assassination in November 1963. Kennedy had been tepidly progressive on racial issues but very popular at the level of public opinion (both Black and white), and so Muhammad joined the chorus of those claiming he had been a good statesman, trying to gain public respectability in the process. Malcolm X, pressed by the media, ignored his instructions and declared that it was a typical case of "chickens coming home to roost": the United States had fomented violence all over the world, so it was no surprise that a US president might also become a victim of that violence[490]. The same anti-racist anger that had attracted him to the NOI finally convinced him to part ways with it.

Going through Changes

His exit from the Nation was the most dramatic event in the life of Malcolm X, who about a year later would be murdered by a group of NOI members, with the collaboration of the police[491]. The most spectacular and significant of his metamorphoses took place in that year, with his long journey to Africa and the Middle East acting as a watershed. In Mecca, he immersed himself for the first time in an environment where the colour of his skin was not perceived negatively, and he met white people who showed him the same respect as they would have paid to anyone else. His view of *racialization*, i.e. of the process through which a racist hierarchy is (re)produced in time and space, went from being close to essentialism (skin colour as an almost inescapable sign of privilege or discrimination) to an increasing awareness of the socially constructed nature of the concept of race: "I first began to perceive that

[490] His words caused a scandal at the time, but it is interesting to note how, less than fifteen years later, the same phrase used by Malcolm ("chickens coming home to roost") would be employed, again with polemical overtones towards US foreign policy, by Hannah Arendt (see her "Home to Roost" [1975], in Ead., *Responsibility and Judgment*, pp. 257-275).
[491] Les Payne, Tamara Payne, *The Dead Are Arising*, p. 467.

'white man', as commonly used, means complexion only secondarily; primarily it described attitudes and actions"[492]. A white person who does not engage in discriminatory behaviour towards non-whites, but instead does everything in her power to renounce any racial privilege, meaning her whiteness ceases to be politically relevant. This kind of simple but impactful experience allowed Malcolm to grasp the extent of one of the main theological differences between NOI's bizarre doctrinal patchwork and Islam – namely, the former's total lack of universalism. If Muslims believed that for God there were no racial differences, NOI devotees made their Black identity a mark of spiritual election. Malcolm thus converted to Sunni Islam, whose millenary tradition was certainly no stranger to the political use of anger. This allowed him to put that anger into a perspective inaccessible to NOI members, who did not believe in an afterlife.

On a political level, a constructivist approach to race opened up many opportunities: whites of goodwill could contribute, albeit from rearguard positions, to the fight against racism. At the same time, separating racialization from religion made it possible to see radical anti-racism as an ecumenical cause, aimed at people of the most diverse faiths and beliefs – greatly increasing its ability to build coalitions. Even before his departure for the Middle East, Malcolm had been moving in this direction with the creation of the OAAU (Organization for Afro-American Unity)[493]. Spending months abroad as a privileged guest and interlocutor of heads of state, intellectuals and diplomats, also meant that his approach to racial injustice, already international in scope, gained a deeper anticolonial perspective and began to have an anti-capitalist sensibility[494]. Malcolm's ballistic of anger recovered its focus: if racism constituted a fundamental feature of capitalism, there was no point in trying to create, in the manner of the NOI, a closed micro-economy of African-American businesses for African-American consumers; similarly, if the conflict between Black and white people in the US was just

[492] Malcolm X, Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 340.

[493] Marable, *Malcolm X*, pp. 341ff. On the OAAU, see William W. Sales Jr., *From Civil Rights to Black Liberation: Malcolm X and the Organization of Afro-American Unity*, South End Press, Boston, 1994.

[494] On this point, see Reiland Rabaka, "Malcolm X and/as Critical Theory. Philosophy, Radical Politics, and the African American Search for Social Justice", in *Journal of Black Studies* 33(2), 2002, p. 155.

one part of "a global rebellion of the oppressed against the oppressor, the exploited against the exploiter"[495], it had to be addressed with the instruments of international politics. Malcolm X's intention to use the institutional framework provided by the U.N. to denounce the racism of his own country – as had already been done for South Africa – and his claim that African Americans would never gain full *civil right*s unless their *human rights* were first recognized, make him the last exponent of an internationalist tradition whose members tried in vain to radicalise the notion of human rights by linking it to the process of decolonization[496].

Another significant change was in his sensitivity to gender issues. During his years in the NOI, his ex-pimp sexism had given way to a more benevolent but no less patriarchal approach. After his break from Elijah Muhammad – which, as we have seen, was partly caused by the discovery that he was a sexual offender – his dialogue with African American women activists[497] and the prominent position that women immediately assumed in the OAAU led him to radically revise his convictions, to the point of affirming that men and women should have completely equal roles in the anti-racist struggle[498].

Nonetheless, during his months abroad it was in the context of the care of the self that Malcolm experienced the deepest changes, allowing him to move past what he called "the narrow-minded confines of the 'straight-jacketed world'"[499]. The slow pace of Middle Eastern and African social and public life was very different from the restless rhythms of NOI's proselytism and made available to him moments of reflection and quiet to which he was not accustomed. After having lived for many years on one meal a day, Malcolm began to eat lunch as well. He reduced his notoriously high consumption

[495] Malcolm X, "Last Answers and Interviews", in George Breitman (ed.), *Malcolm X* Speaks, p. 217.

[496] This attempt, also made by Du Bois in the previous decade, was unsuccessful. In the 1970s human rights were already drifting toward the paternalistic humanitarianism that Malcolm himself had criticised. See Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia. Human Rights in History*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2010, pp. 100-107.

[497] See the seminal article by Erik. S. McDuffie and Komozi Woodard, "'If you're in a country that's progressive, the woman is progressive'. Black Women Radicals and The Making of the Politics and Legacy of Malcolm X", in *Biography* 36 (3), 2013, pp. 507-539.

[498] Cf. bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture. Resisting Representations* [1994], Routledge, New York 2008, pp. 217-226.

[499] Marable, *Malcolm X*, p. 369.

of caffeine, often taking a nap in the afternoon. He also dined in the company of local authorities and acquaintances, no longer disdaining social occasions (the care of the self, it should be remembered, is not supposed to take place in isolation); after more than a decade, he went to the movies and even to theater. As deep-rooted as his adherence to Islam was, it no longer carried any of the self-flagellating moralism which had become typical within NOI (and which the Cynics had never shared).

It is interesting to note, on the other hand, that his time away from the US was by no means an interlude of idleness: he was still constantly giving speeches and interviews, penning editorials for the local press, establishing connections and building alliances with an ease that worried US intelligence and diplomacy to no small degree – Malcolm X was rapidly becoming one of the most influential political figures of what was then known as the Third World[500]. Still, there was a new dimension, of something approaching pleasure, in all these activities: however hard the existence he had chosen was, he was happy with it. For a long time, Muhammad had denied that his disciple was ready to take care of himself, maintaining that it was him, the Messenger, who knew what was best for both of them. Malcolm was proving him wrong.

Malcolm X had reached what we might call a proficiency in anger: the ability to put it completely at the service of Cynical parrhesia. Once back in the US, in a matter of months he was able to establish an anti-racist network that kept together Harlem's churches and Muslim authorities, the youngest and most engaged members of the civil rights movements and future Black Panthers, and Black and white people. He sensed the potential of an alliance between radicals and moderates, between Martin Luther King's civil disobedience and an approach ready to fuel radical anger and to embrace some forms violence. As the historian Peniel Joseph argues in a study that opens up new interpretative horizons, between 1964 and 1965 Malcolm and King established a sort of

[500] Ibid., pp. 363-364; 373; 383. On Malcolm X's internationalism see, among others: James A. Tyner, "Territoriality, social justice and gendered revolutions in the speeches of Malcolm X", in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 29, 2004, pp. 330-343; Kehinde Andrews, "Beyond Pan-Africanism: Garveyism, Malcolm X and the end of the colonial nation state", in *Third World Quarterly* 38(11), 2017, pp. 2501-2516; Hamzah Baig, "'Spirit in Opposition'. Malcolm X and the Question of Palestine", in *Social Text* 37(3), 2019, pp. 47-71.

implicit complementarity: their positions became in fact ever closer, while their political rhetoric, capable of mobilising different sectors of the population, skilfully emphasised the differences that still remained. It was also thanks to Malcolm that a man like King, who for a long time was perceived by most white Americans as a dangerous agitator [501], could begin to appear as the voice of common sense, who drew the line below which anti-racists could make no compromises. Similarly, it was the increasingly combative tactics of the civil rights movement led by King that made Malcolm X's radical analyses sound more realistic to a wider audience – and therefore even more dangerous to the racist status quo[502].

In the context of this virtual back and forth between two of the best orators and political organisers of the time, Malcolm further refined his use of anger. For example, the speech "The Ballot or the Bullet" already posed an ultimatum to the authorities in its title: either they accepted the demands for equal political rights that King and the civil rights movement had been making for far too long, or someone would come along and take those same rights through violent means. The call for the use of "any means necessary" did not, however, coincide with militarism or with the celebration of violence. Anyone who, like Malcolm, had learned how to hold a gun as a young boy knew that there was nothing flippant about the use of force, even when it was successful. The readiness to resort to any means expressed an idea at once more basic and more refined: "the oppressed cannot let the legitimacy of their forms of struggle be defined by the oppressors. Any means necessary: we will decide which ones"[503]. When he thought that King was being too soft, Malcolm would hit him with the same Cynical wit that he had

[501] E.g. Alex Gourevitch, "When King Was Dangerous", in *Jacobin*, 21/1/2019.

[502] Peniel E. Joseph, *The Sword and the Shield. The Revolutionary Lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.*, Basic Books, New York 2020.

[503] Alessandro Portelli, "Malcolm X: rivisitato", in Malcolm X, Alex Haley, *Autobiografia*, Italian trans. by R. Giammanco, BUR, Milan 2020, p. 12. It is important to note that even within the "non-violent" civil rights movement the eventuality of armed self-defense was never ruled out: see Charles E. Cobb Jr., *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed. How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible*, Duke University Press, Durham 2015.

shown when he called the March on Washington "a picnic"[504]. At other times, he praised King's intelligence and reminded the authorities of the message they both wanted to convey at that point: if you won't give in nicely to the Christian reverend, you will give in painfully to the Muslim leader. Malcom X was convinced that his militant approach to racial injustice was the best one and that white institutions would not peacefully bend to King's demands - nonetheless, he had developed the foresight to put his anger at the service of the common struggle.

In Birmingham[505] as in Selma[506], two key moments in the stand-off between the anti-racist front and the government, Malcolm's appearance while King was in jail galvanised the activists and raised the tone of the confrontation to the maximum, creating the conditions for the authorities to capitulate – had they not, anti-racist violence would have erupted in the streets[507]. A paradoxical thought spread among law enforcement agencies across the country at the time: the man who could most easily have sparked violence was also the only one who could avert a riot if he saw fit – because even the most radical protesters trusted his judgement. Indeed, impoverished African Americans "could admire Dr. King, but Malcolm not only spoke their language, he had lived their experiences – in foster homes, in prisons, in unemployment lines. Malcolm was loved because he could present himself as one of them"[508].

[504] Malcolm X, Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 286. The March on Washington was a massive, non-violent anti-racist protest march that took place on August 28th, 1963. It was also the occasion of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.

[505] Between April and May 1963, the town of Birmingham, Alabama, was the scene of a heated conflict between the civil rights movement (specifically, King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights) and Alabama's segregationist institutions. The ensuing confrontation between protesters and police was a product of the direct-action campaign known as Project C (Project Confrontation), which challenged laws that were designed to limit African Americans' rights and ensure racial discrimination.

[506] From January to March 1965, Selma was at the centre of the one of the most intense campaigns for African American voters' registration, openly opposed by the Alabama authorities. Malcolm X was there in February, while Alabama state troopers attacked nonviolent civil rights marchers on March, 7th, in a shocking display of violence that was broadcasted almost in real time.

[507] August H. Nimtz, "Violence and/or Nonviolence in the Success of the Civil Rights Movement. The Malcolm X-Martin Luther King, Jr. Nexus", in *New Political Science* 38 (1), 2016, pp. 6-17.

[508] Marable, *Malcolm X*, p. 480.

In his final weeks, Malcolm X had to face all sorts of difficulties and dangers, but at the same time he was totally immersed in his role as a παρρησιαστής: "I come here to tell you the truth – he told the students of the London School of Economics – And if the truth is anti-American, then blame the truth, don't blame me"[509]. He explicitly affirmed the catalysing function of anger in generating political action, drawing a connection between the anger of African Americans and that of people fighting in anti-colonial struggles[510]. By then in open conflict with the NOI, Malcolm stressed the importance of his hard-fought independence: "I feel like a man who has been asleep somewhat and under someone else's control. I feel what I am thinking and saying now is for myself"[511]. He publicly denounced the hypocrisy shown by Muhammad in his private life and the ideologically regressive role that the Nation had begun to play, due to its refusal to engage in meaningful political actions and its tendency to foster senseless spirals of internal violence between factions. In response, some NOI members started making threats against him and organised several failed attempts on his life. Malcolm denounced every single intimidation in the press, hoping that the media spotlight would protect him or at least his loved ones[512].

However, his anger never degraded into hatred: up to the very last day of his life, he was determined to prove that he was different from Muhammad, that he was not seeking power for power's sake. The homicidal fury of the Nation frightened him, but he did not allow it to alter his political agenda. On the night between the 13th and the 14th February 1965, members of the NOI threw three Molotov-cocktails into Malcolm's house, one of which exploded a few metres from his daughters' room, starting a fire that destroyed part of the building. Malcolm helped his wife escape through the back door, then picked up his daughters and placed them safely in the backyard, re-entering the burning house to save a few objects. Still wearing pyjamas in the cold weather, he had

[509] Malcolm X, *February 1965. The Final Speeches*, Pathfinder, New York 1992, p. 62.
[510] Ibid., pp. 52-53, 86.
[511] Ibid., p. 213.
[512] Marable, *Malcolm X*, pp. 408-409.

Betty and the girls driven to a safe place, then got into his car and drove to the airport – he was meant to be making a speech in Detroit, and he would not give the bombers the satisfaction of seeing it cancelled[513].

The speech he gave at the Ford auditorium[514], a masterpiece in Cynical imperturbability and skilfully dosed anger, represents one the highest points of Malcolm X's parrhesia. No one else would have been able to break the ice, after narrowly escaping death and not having got any sleep since the previous night, by apologising for his unusually informal clothes – the only ones he had managed to save from the fire. Malcolm launched into a careful examination of the political situation at the time, clearly linking the national and international levels and reiterating the need for an anti-racist invocation of human rights. At one point, in an unexpected digression, he emphasised the role that the NOI had played in paving the way for the civil rights movement that was to follow: even in a speech in which he called the Messenger a charlatan, delivered under the suspicion that it was Muhammad who had ordered the attack on his house, Malcolm showed his commitment to truth-telling. As usual, he joked with the audience, criticised Black economic elites and US imperialism vigorously, poked fun at the moderate anti-racists, was applauded as he outlined the direction for the mobilisations to come. His political vision was clearly still evolving, enriched day by day with sharper critical tools, as his many enemies knew all too well.

At an OAAU event at the Audubon Ballroom on 21st February, a NOI hit squad shot him dead, with Elijah Muhammad's blessing [515]. In the hours leading up to the event, Malcolm X insisted to his associates that at least there, in his own Harlem, they should not search the people who came in. According to those who witnessed the scene, he argued that those military practices should be left to Muhammad and his cronies[516]. He did not expect to be killed that very afternoon, in a crowded public place, with Betty

[513] Ibid., pp. 416-417.

[514] Malcolm X, *The Final Speeches*, pp. 91-131.

[515] The best account of the shooting and the related responsibilities can be found is Les Payne, Tamara Payne, *The Dead Are Arising,* pp. 502-515.

[516] Marable, *Malcolm X*, pp. 421-422.

and their daughters sitting a few steps away from the stage. Yet this is how he died, reaffirming his diversity one last time, living without hiding, putting his body on the front line. He left us, among other things, the legacy of an anger that goes hand in hand with the care of oneself and that of others; that is uncompromising but at the same time ready to play its part within a larger movement; and that is ready to take up arms but does not want Black people, on a cloudy afternoon in Harlem, to feel as if they are already at war.

Malcolm X, Michel Foucault, and Us

In the previous chapter, we saw that Solanas' personal and political loneliness made her commitment to anger extremely burdensome. Lacking any master-figure able to introduce her to some form of *ἐπιμέλεια*, the practice of the care of the self was never within her reach. In this chapter, Malcolm X has given us an example of radical anger that was as political as one can imagine: his life was deeply influenced by the people he met, the groups he was into, the friendships he cultivated. Significantly, Malcolm's biography also shows that not being alone does not necessarily make anger against structural injustice less dangerous. In this connection, it should be kept in mind that models of leadership less reliant on a single, charismatic figure may be more effective in defending those who use radical anger from retaliations[517]. At the same time, Malcom X's life as "America's angriest Black man" cannot be reduced to his tragic death: anger had shaped his existence at least since his prison years and fueled many of his subsequent changes. Especially after his break with the NOI, Malcolm realized that political anger works more effectively when driven by self-care, rather than by self-sacrifice.

[517] As convincingly argued by Erica R. Edwards, the fiction that social and political change is impossible in the absence of a gifted male charismatic leadership shaped African American culture throughout the twentieth century (*Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership*, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis 2012). For a thorough critique of the notion of leadership, see Robinson, *The Terms of Order*, esp. chaps. II and IV.

Some readers may still wonder why in this chapter I did not devote more space to Michel Foucault. Indeed, if the concepts I employed to re-read the life and ideas of Malcolm X come from the French philosopher, why not focusing on him? The reason behind my choice brings us back the "primacy of practical reason" that we encountered in Chapter 3. The fact that Malcolm did not write down his philosophy is not enough to conclude that his theoretical contributions were null. Even if he was not necessarily aware of that, his philosophical life already expressed the kind of reappropriation of Cynicism that Foucault later theorised. Moreover, the fact that Malcom X *embodied* the legacy of Cynicism put him in a better position to grasp the role that anger can play in the care of the self and in the related practice of parrhesia. Without Foucault's impressive theoretical work, we probably would not be able to fully understand Malcolm's contribution to a political philosophy of radical anger – but without Malcolm, there wouldn't be much to understand.

Finally, I would also like to stress a further, perhaps marginal point: paying more attention to Malcolm X may spare us many useless debates about the late Foucault. The strict connection between existential changes and the care of the self, to be sure, was not foreign to the French philosopher. Throughout his career, Foucault constantly reclaimed his right to change his mind, to take unpredictable and non-linear deviations along his intellectual and political paths. As he famously stated in the *Archaeology of Knowledge*: "Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write"[518]. In his final years, one can notice a convergence between this recurring theme (the intellectual as an always-changing figure), the care of the self and the realm of aesthetics. On the one hand, Foucault explicitly described his work as an artistic practice: "For me intellectual work is related to what you could call aestheticism, meaning transforming yourself. […] Why should a painter work if he is

[518] Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* [1969], trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith, Routledge, Abingdon 2002, p. 19.

not transformed by his own painting?"[519]. On the other, his research on the ancient *ἐπιμέλεια* prompted him to introduce the notion of "aesthetics of existence" to name the constitution of existence, within Greek thought, as "an object of aesthetic elaboration and perception"[520]. From this angle, the care of the self can be seen as the constant modification of a work of art (one's existence) that is never fully complete.

Foucault did not live long enough to make such theoretical convergence more explicit, leaving us with a number of unresolved issues. A frequent objection has been that, despite his reassurances[521], he was projecting a form of modern dandyism onto the ancient care of the self. This may imply a significant deradicalization (and depoliticization) of *ἐπιμέλεια*: from the ancient philosophers' asceticism to the bourgeois intellectual who rejoices in his inconsistencies. While I think there may be good reasons to defend Foucault against such charges[522], we don't need an umpteenth polemic about this author to find an agreement on the ongoing relevance of the care of the self. In fact, Malcolm X's final year, which I have dealt with in the previous section, shows that a modern notion of self-transformation can fully coexist with the key features of the ancient conception of *ἐπιμέλεια*, as well as with the view of philosophy as a consistent combination of discourse and life. Moreover, both as political figure and as an intellectual one, Malcom X is surely immune from the charges of dandyism and/or retreat from politics that are often raised against Foucault.

Still, both these figures shared a sort of heroic dimension. With all their differences, they were excellent in what they did – and were often regarded as such by their contemporaries. Both proved to be extremely determinate and ambitious, also possessing more than a fair share of bravery. Their intelligence knew few rivals. In short, looking at them we may be tempted to believe that radical anger, as the Greeks'

[519] Michel Foucault, *The Minimalist Self* [1982-1983], in Lawrence D. Kritzman (ed.), *Michel Foucault. Politics Philosophy Culture. Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, Routledge, London 1988, p. 14.
[520] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, p. 162.
[521] Cf. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, pp. 12-13.
[522] Some of them can be found in Daniel Smith, "Foucault on Ethics and Subjectivity: 'Care of the Self' and 'Aesthetics of Existence', in *Foucault Studies* 19, 2015, pp. 135-150.

parrhesia, is for a spiritually elected minority. Such a temptation, I will argue at the end of next chapter, should be resisted.

Chapter 6. Sororal Anger: On Audre Lorde

A Poetics of Anger

At first sight, anger and poetry do not have much in common. We tend to associate anger with a style of communication that we would hardly call poetical. Angry people can easily sound offensive or even threatening; their voices are too loud, and their gesturing is agitated. On the other hand, when we are enraged, we often struggle to find the right words; no exclamation seems strong enough, and no imprecation could effectively convey the anger that we feel. We are then invited to calm down and to express our thoughts in a more comprehensible and less injurious language. Toning it down, however, can also produce a loss rather than an increase in meaning, a sort of lost in translation. When one is forced to adopt an ordinary, smooth register to express her anger, does it not overlook the potential incommensurability of one's anger and its resistance to being formulated through everyday words? The Ancient Cynics, who knew the insidiousness of good manners well, believed that certain truths could not be told with kindness. The diatribe and parrhesia were precisely their means to tell the truth in a radically uncensured way.

The etymological meaning of poetry is significantly close to the need to find words that do not come to our mouth: ποίησις, which means bringing to existence new terms, giving names "to those ideas which are – until the poem – nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt"[523]. For those who belong to a group of people who experience one or more forms of structural injustice, a poetry so conceived can become a weapon against what Miranda Fricker calls *hermeneutical injustice*, that is "when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences"[524]. Fricker's central example of

[523] Audre Lorde, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury" [1977], in Ead., *Sister Outsider*, Penguin, London 2019, p. 25.

[524] Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice. Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, p. 1.

hermeneutical injustice is that of a person who suffers sexual harassment within a culture that still lacks that critical concept[525]. Since individuals have more or less socially complex identities, one can experience hermeneutical injustice "in a context where one aspect of one's identity is to the fore ('woman'), but not in other contexts where other aspects" are more significant (e.g. 'middle-class')[526].

As a Black woman of low social status, a lesbian and a person whose health had been fragile since childhood, Audre Lorde, the poet who will be the protagonist of this chapter, surely had several forms of hermeneutical injustice to counter. She inhabited a world in which people like her, if they were noticed at all, were addressed through words and definitions produced by others. From this came her awareness that "poetry is not a luxury", but "a revelatory distillation of experience" which gives voice to the pre-discursive intuition that what happens to us is not inevitable[527]. Lorde had an almost physical conception of poetry, closer to the craftmanship implied by the ancient Greek ποίησις than to the work of many of her contemporaries. She described poetry as if it were a tool or an implement:

> Of all the art forms, poetry is the most economical. It is the one which is the most secret, which requires the least physical labor, the least material, and the one which can be done within shifts, in the hospital pantry, on the subway, and on scraps of surplus paper. […] poetry has been the major voice of poor, working class, and Colored women. A room of one's own may be a necessity for writing prose, but so are reams of paper, a typewriter, and plenty of time[528].

Poetry is a resource that can be mobilized against those "tyrannies of silence" which Lorde began to experience as a child, when her parents never spoke of their difficult condition as Black immigrants living in 1930s New York in their attempts to protect Audre and her two sisters from the inhospitality of the external world. "I had no words

[525] Ibid., pp. 149ff.
[526] Ibid., p. 153.
[527] Lorde, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury", pp. 26-27.
[528] Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference", in Ead., *Sister Outsider*, p. 109.

for racism", she wrote when recalling that period many years later[529]. Violent manifestations of racial injustice during her childhood (white people on the sidewalk who spat on little Audre just because she was Black) were reframed by her mother Linda as mere accidents caused by "people who had no better sense nor manners than to spit into the wind no matter where they went". When Lorde, already grown up, casually noted one day that "people don't spit into the wind so much the way they used to", the look on her mother's face told her that she had stumbled into "one of those secret places of pain that must never be spoken of again"[530].

Far from always being a simple absence of signs, silence arises in many different ways, all of which "are an integral part of the [power] strategies that underlie and permeate discourses"[531]. In response to racist violence, the silence of Lorde's mother worked like a closet for "her hidden angers"[532], which she could not voice if she wanted her family to survive. Linda's repressed anger resurfaced in the almost military discipline she imposed on her daughters and, in particular, on Audre, the youngest and the most stubborn of the three. Her mother's behaviour only prompted Lorde's anger in response, which resulted in a vicious circle that she aptly described in a poem entitled *Generation II*:

A Black girl
going
into the woman
her mother
desired

[529] Audre Lorde, *Zami* [1982], in Ead., *Zami. Sister Outsider. Undersong*, Quality Paperback Book Club, New York 1993, p. 81.

[530] Ibid, pp. 17-18. As Lorde wrote elsewhere: "My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had ever made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences. And it was the concern and caring of all those women which gave me strength and enabled me to scrutinize the essentials of my living" ("The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" [1977], in Ead., *The Cancer Journals* [1980], Penguin, New York 2020, p. 13).

[531] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I*, p. 27.

[532] Lorde, *Zami*, p. 32.

and prayed for
walks alone
and afraid
of both
their angers[533].

Once she became a mother herself, Lorde wrote that she "peeled away [Linda's] anger/down to the core of love" but only at the price of defining herself in contrast with her mother: "I learned from you/to define myself/through your denials"[534]. Unlike her mother, Audre was not just a Black woman but also a left-wing political activist and a lesbian — all this at a time when US anti-capitalists considered homosexuality a bourgeois vice and the early LGBT groups were not particularly interested in racism[535]. Lorde soon realised she was an outsider, a member of a group of pioneers and outcasts; it was a feeling that never left her:

I remember how being young and Black and gay and lonely felt. A lot of it was fine, feeling I had the truth and the light and the key, but a lot of it was purely hell. There were no mothers, no sisters, no heroes. We had to do it alone, like our sister Amazons […] We, young and Black and fine and gay, sweated out our first heartbreaks with no school nor office chums to share that confidence over lunch hour. […] We discovered and explored our attention to women alone, sometimes in secret, sometimes in defiance, sometimes in little pockets that almost touched […] but always alone, against a greater aloneness. We did it cold turkey, and although it resulted in some pretty imaginative tough women when we survived, too many of us did not survive at all[536].

These well-known lines from her autobiography show that Lorde experienced, at the same time, two forms of structural injustice against which Valerie Solanas and Malcolm

[533] Audre Lorde, "Generation II" [1973], in Ead., *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 2000, p. 81.
[534] Audre Lorde, "Black Mother Woman" [1973], in *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*, p. 68.
[535] Lorde, *Zami*, p. 149.
[536] Ibid., pp. 176-177.

X fought: heteropatriarchy and racism[537]. She also embodied several key features of these two figures: she was a writer and a feminist killjoy (like Solanas), but also a charismatic public speaker and a political activist (like Malcolm X). Furthermore, her complex relationship with anger began, as we have seen, in an early stage of her life, later developing its political potential in a number of ways. In contrast to both Solanas and X, Lorde dealt explicitly and at some length with the importance of anger for her personal and political development. As a consequence, she allows us to make our political philosophy of anger both richer and more refined.

In the passage above, Lorde's position as an outsider emerges clearly, although in a way that is still in need of political elaboration. Becoming aware of living in a society where people like you "were never meant to survive – not as human beings"[538] is of fundamental importance, but one may still fall pray of what Mark Fisher defined as *reflexive impotence*, a condition in which an individual knows that "things are bad", but also that she "can't do anything about it"[539]. Precisely because Lorde's position was a socially marginalised one, she might be tempted to keep a low profile, silence her anger and try to camouflage herself in a hostile environment. It is not by chance that reflexive impotence takes the form of a self-fulfilling prophecy: I cannot change things as they are because I am impotent, hence things remain the same, retrospectively confirming my impotence[540]. For Lorde, even thinking of herself as a potential political subject was not an easy task: after reviewing the main English dictionaries available around the time Lorde's autobiography appeared, Marilyn Frye concluded that language itself marked lesbian identity as impossible. In fact, while "lesbian" was said of a woman having sexual relationships with other women, "sex" itself was defined in a completely phallocentric way – as an activity impossible to practice without a penis. As a

[537] Obviously, all three of them also lived under an exploitative capitalist system.
[538] Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action", p. 14.
[539] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, p. 21.
[540] Mark Fisher, "Dis-Identity Politics", in Id., *K-Punk*, p. 167.

consequence, Frye wrote, "speaking of women who have sex with other women is like speaking of ducks who engage in arm wrestling"[541].

Lorde, however, did not remain silent. Instead, she embraced her anger and made it a hallmark of her poetry, too. Through poetry, she became able to communicate the feelings that her mother kept inside. In order to do so, she developed (and put into practice) two key notions: *the erotic* and the *uses of anger*. In the next section I will analyze the former, while in the third one I will focus on the latter.

Towards an Erotic of Anger

Lorde offered her most detailed account of the erotic in a paper delivered at a conference hosted by the Mount Holyoke College (South Hadley, Massachusetts), in August 1978. Her paper was intended for an audience composed primarily of women historians (exceedingly white and heterosexual), "who had organized their own conferences in response to the isolation they had experienced within the mostly male American Historical Association"[542]. In the light of this context, Lyndon Gill has recently claimed that Lorde's multiple references to the erotic as "female" should not be read as presenting it as an exclusive domain of women[543]. While Gill has a point, I think it is also fair to highlight from the beginning that, within her paper, Lorde offered reasons to believe that the experience of the erotic is, in an heteropatriarchal society, most frequently lived by women: "the male world – she wrote – values this depth of feeling [which the erotic discloses] enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but fears this same depth too much to examine the possibility of it within themselves"[544]. What is, then, the erotic?

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[541] Marilyn Frye, "To Be and Be Seen. The Politics of Reality", in Ead., *The politics of reality: essays in feminist theory*, The Crossing Press, Freedom (CA) 1983, pp. 156-158.

[542] Lyndon K. Gill, "In the Realm of Our Lorde: Eros and the Poet Philosopher", in *Feminist Studies* 40(1), 2014, pp. 183-184.

[543] Ibid., pp. 184-185.

[544] Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" [1978], in Ead., *Sister Outsider*, pp. 43-44.

Lorde's text was a seven-pages struggle to find a satisfactory answer to this question, mixing poetical insights with more analytical distinctions and explanations. The erotic – she claimed – is "a source of power and information" rooted in "unexpressed or unrecognized feelings"[545]; "an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire"[546]. The erotic is in no way limited to the sexual sphere: relegating it "to the bedroom alone" is just the way in which heteropatriarchy tries to curb its potential[547]. In this connection, the opposite of the erotic is the "pornographic": while the latter emphasises sensation and suppresses feeling, the former is both "spiritual" and "political" – or, more precisely, is a bridge which allows their constant connection[548].

In its simplest form, the erotic springs "from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person". The product of an experience of this kind is joy:

> The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference[549].

These remarks are of fundamental importance for Lorde's political thought. In her view, "institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy", which relies on interpersonal differences (of sex, race, class, age etc.) to classify certain people as "surplus"[550]. This simple fact implies that all of us have been trained to handle difference in one of three ways: ignore it; if that is not possible, copy with it "if we think it is dominant", or destroy it "if we think it is subordinate"[551]. However, it is not

[545] Ibid., p. 43.
[546] Ibid., p. 44.
[547] Ibid., p. 47.
[548] Ibid., pp. 44; 46.
[549] Ibid., p. 46.
[550] Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex", p. 108. For a contemporary, nuanced development of this intuition, see Nancy Fraser, *Cannibal Capitalism*, Verso, London-New York 2022, chap. 2.
[551] Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex", p. 108.

differences in themselves that separate us – it is rather our refusal to recognize them, to take them as neither insurmountable barriers nor irrelevant details, but as "a springboard for creative change"[552]. Within the US women's movement of the 1970s, Lorde argued, white women were focusing on their oppression *qua* women, while ignoring relevant differences among women themselves[553]. As a result, a Black lesbian feminist like her was constantly pressured to "pluck out some one aspect of [herself] and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self"[554] – and, we may add, multiplying her exposure to hermeneutical injustice.

The erotic, then, is precisely what discloses the possibility of being different *as equals*, i.e. without assuming that differences have to make some people inferior. Indeed, this (re)production of hierarchies is what happens every day in our capitalist world – what Lorde in *Uses of the Erotic* called "a profit economy" -, but we can and should resist the capitalist, racist, and heteropatriarchal mobilization of differences as "tools of social control"[555]. Dismissing or misnaming differences would prevent, for example, white women to recognize "their built-in privilege of whiteness" – but that would only weaken the feminist movement as a whole, for white and non-white women alike[556]. The erotic, on the other hand, allows women to rejoice in sharing a common pursuit, while at same time illuminating their differences as resources, rather than threats.

Since the erotic implies a serious consideration of interpersonal differences and their role in structuring many forms of injustice, the intensity of feeling it involves is not always easy to handle and comes with a destabilizing potential. It is here that anger enters the picture in an innovative, challenging way: among the experiences paving the

[552] Ibid. On the importance of change within one's life, Lorde felt particularly close to Malcolm X: "When I read Malcolm X with careful attention, I found a man much closer to the complexities of real change than anything I had read before. […] One of the most basic Black survival skills is the ability to change, to metabolize experience, good or ill, into something that is useful, lasting, effective. Four hundred years of survival as an endangered species has taught most of us that, if we intend to live, we had better become fast learners. Malcolm knew this" (Lorde, "Learning from the 60s", in Ead., *Sister Outsider*, pp. 129-130).

[553] Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex", p. 109.

[554] Ibid., p. 113.

[555] Ibid., pp. 111; 115.

[556] Ibid., p. 110.

way for the erotic, Lorde mentioned also fighting with her (political) "sisters". Indeed, "fighting" and getting angry can be signs that we care for the person we have in front of us: I am angry at you because you are not indifferent to me, because I see in you a potential ally and comrade – someone with whom I may live that deep form of sharing that is the erotic.

From the perspective of a political philosophy of radical anger, here we have a completely new hypothesis: in fighting against structural injustice, anger should not be aimed only at our adversaries of enemy, but at our allies, too. It is easy to imagine the occasions in which an anger of this particular kind may be triggered: even among feminists, as Lorde knew well, differences can be used as weapons, rather than as opportunities. In order to grasp the various aspects of Lorde's innovative conceptualization of anger, I will now turn to two of her most famous speeches.

Anger: A User's Guide

In 1979, Audre Lorde was invited to an academic conference celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*[557]. Her participation had been given great prominence by the organisers, who had even named her as a "consultant" in the event programme. Nevertheless, she used the time available to her to deliver a scathing critique of the conference itself. Lorde told the audience that she had been contacted the previous year to comment "upon papers dealing with the role of difference within the lives of american [uncapitalized in the original] women: difference of race, sexuality, class, age"[558]. Once at the conference, however, she realised that the few presentations by Black and/or lesbian feminists had been relegated to the short panel chaired by her, while the rest of the packed programme included

[557] Curiously, no reliable English translation of *Le Deuxième Sexe* existed at the time: the only one available, made by a professor of zoology, featured about 90% of the original text and contained many mistranslations. See Margaret A. Simons, "The Silencing of Simone de Beauvoir. Guess What's Missing from *The Second Sex*", in *Women's Studies International Forum* 6(5), 1983, pp. 559-564.

[558] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" [1979], in Ead., *Sister Outsider*, p. 103.

discussions by white heterosexual scholars only. The underlying idea seemed to be that topics such as the relationship between racism and sexism would have interested only non-white women – and that only the latter could speak about those issues, since they "[had] nothing to say about existentialism, the erotic, women's culture and silence, developing feminist theory" and so on[559]. If this were not enough, the other two Black women participating as speakers had been invited at the last minute. As for Lorde's greatly advertised "consultancy", it turned out to consist of "two phone calls" – as if calling her was, she observed wryly, the only possible way to get the names of some non-white feminist scholars[560]. Whether on purpose or not, the approach of the organisers had been one of "mere tolerance of the differences between women", a denial of their "creative function"[561]. Anticipating the possible objection that, since all the attendees were feminist intellectuals, those differences were of secondary relevance, Lorde went personal in a way that the Cynics would have liked:

> If white american [uncapitalised in the original] feminist theory need not deal with the differences between us, and the resulting difference in our oppressions, then how do you deal with the fact that the women who clean your houses and tend your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor women and women of Color?[562]

Lorde's anger was palpable – and all the more intense given that she was facing women who were supposed to be her allies. By merely tolerating difference, they were implicitly refusing to engage in an erotic dialogue.

The title of her polemical intervention – "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" – has become famous far beyond the confines of US feminism. The idea behind this telling phrase was that white, heterosexual feminists were treating non-white and lesbian ones like men used to treat women: conceding them a little,

[559] Ibid.
[560] Ibid., p. 105.
[561] Ibid., p. 104.
[562] Ibid., p. 105.

insignificant space and feeling generous about that, too. At stake there was that consistency between theory and practice which is essential, as we saw in Chapter 4, for living a *feminist life*.

The importance of Lorde's metaphor, however, greatly exceeds these considerations – and a brief digression will help us to unpack its connection to anger. To begin with, let us go back for a moment to "Uses of the Erotic". There, Lorde described the misrecognition of the erotic in visual terms: two people who miss the opportunity of erotically sharing a certain pursuit are characterized by "a simultaneous looking away"[563]. Modern society, she contended, domesticates the erotic by reducing it to "certain proscribed erotic comings-together" (religious ceremonies, marital sex, even "mob violence")[564]. In those contexts, we "look away from ourselves" in order to hide our deepest feelings and we rather focus on "the feelings of those others who participate in the experience with us"[565]. Lorde was describing one of those all-too-familiar moments when, despite being in the company of other people, we feel alone – failing to enter in a truly meaningful relationship with them precisely because we first refused to have such a relationship with ourselves. Far from really sharing the others' feelings, we objectify them, we "abuse" them as if we were spies or voyeurs[566]. This way of looking Lorde referred to as "the pornographic", the opposite of the erotic[567]. The erotic, she seemed to suggest us, does not fit well with the visual – in fact, the best way to understand pornography is to conceive it not as a property of certain images or objects (an approach which fails to explain how the same image can be featured in both pornographic and non-pornographic contexts, like an adult magazine and an art

[563] Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic", p. 48.
[564] Ibid., pp. 48-49.
[565] Ibid., p. 48.
[566] Ibid.
[567] Ibid., p. 49.

exhibition). Pornography is rather a property of the gaze, a *way of seeing*[568] that objectivizes the person who is seen while negating her the possibility to look back[569].

The erotic, as Lorde tried to define it, does not belong to the realm of the visual, but to that of touch – it is this proximity to touch that makes it possible to *use* the erotic. In Paolo Virno's words, in the concept of *use* (a notion which we may locate at the crossroads of philosophy and ballistics) "touch prevails on sight"[570]. What we use is never strictly speaking "in front of us", never completely a pseudo-Cartesian object detached from the subject (i.e. from the user). The things that we use are better described, according to Virno, as "adjacent, collateral, capable of attrition"[571]. As such, they have a retroactive influence on the one who uses them – if a firefighter begins to use a flame thrower instead of a hydrant, she can no longer be considered a firefighter. On the other hand, usable things are characterized by a certain amount of versatility: they are open to different *usage modes*. The erotic can therefore be used in a conservative, limited way (e.g. by confining it to sexual activity), but also in a radical, expansive mode (as in Lorde's view), poetry can be used to contrast hermeneutical injustice or just to entertain friends, and so on. The never complete coincidence between the user and what gets used causes an attrition that produces effects on both of them: my use of Roger Federer's tennis racket will be considerably more limited that Federer's, who has access to usage modes unconceivable to me; neither of us, conversely, can use the racket as a microwave.

With this conception of use in mind, we can return to "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House". In the setting of the 1979 conference in De Beauvoir's honour, the message that Lorde intended to send through that expression was quite clear:

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[568] To the best of my knowledge, the only author who has interpreted pornography along these lines is the metaphysician Stephen Mumford (see his largely unnoticed essay "A Pornographic Way of Seeing", in Hans Maes (ed.), *Pornographic Art and the Aesthetics of Pornography*, Palgrave MacMillan, London 2013, pp. 58-72). One of the main limits of Mumford's position consists, in my view, in his extremely narrow conception of the erotic as something that "has a sexual purpose" (Ibid., p. 68).

[569] This implies that pornography is one possible form of what Nicholas Mirzoeff called *visuality*, i.e. "the exclusive claim to be able to look" ("The Right to Look", in *Critical Inquiry* 37(3), 2011, p. 474).

[570] Paolo Virno, "L'uso della vita", in Id., *L'idea di mondo. Intelletto pubblico e uso della vita*, Macerata 2015, p. 117.

[571] Ibid.

a hypocritical, entitled kind of tolerance which takes the latter as sheer tokenism, is surely a *master's* tool: that is, it can only be used in oppressive ways. White feminist scholars should not have dismissed Black feminist ones as male scholars did with their female counterparts.

However, a tool can belong to the master also in a different sense – i.e. it may be just possessed or owned by the master. This is what Virno describes as the *institutional* dimension of use[572], in the light of which a behaviour repeated for long enough by a sufficiently high number of people becomes *customary* ("custom" being just one of the possible meanings of "use"). Private property, for example, is simply a particularly successful instance of institutionalised use, as it emerges from the legal notion of *usucapion*: in Roman law, *usucapere* designated "a mode of acquiring title to property by uninterrupted possession of it for a definite period"[573]. Among the master's tools, then, there may also be some suitable for being expropriated by the servants, who could then *use* them against the master. In other words, some tools of the master may be such merely as a result of a process of institutionalisation: nothing in their shape or structure rules out non-oppressive usages modes.

Although in 1979 Lorde had not affirmed it yet[574], *anger is precisely one of those potentially radical tools which deserve to be taken from the master*. What is sure is that she was already making use of her radical anger – and people were reacting to it.

In fact, the eight conference organisers sent her a letter stigmatising her behaviour, pointing out that her remarks had been "enormously painful" to them and saying that they had arranged the event in the way they did precisely to avoid vindictive attitudes

[572] Ibid., p. 125.

[573] I am using (no pun intended) the Merriam Webster's definition. The contemporary legacy of usucapion can be seen, for example, in the notions of *civic* and *collective use* adopted by several urban movements – see, among many others, Nicola Capone, "The Concrete Utopia of the Commons. The Right of Civic and Collective Use of Public (and Private) Goods", in *Philosophy Kitchen* 4(7), 2017, pp. 131-145.

[574] She was however on the right path, as demonstrated by a poem she published in 1973: "everything can be used/except what is wasteful/(you will need/to remember this when you are accused of destruction.)". See "For Each of You" [1973], in Lorde, *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*, p. 59. Lorde would later quote these very lines in her "The Uses of Anger".

like those showed by Lorde, who they accused of playing the victim[575]. What the authors of the letter hoped for was a kind of moratorium on the political use of anger, so as to focus that feeling on a common enemy (patriarchy), without letting it seep into the feminist movement in the wake of its failings in terms of racism and homophobia. After all, were not the conditions of white women in the United States already oppressive enough to blame them for some relative advantage they had over their Black sisters? Apart from its specificities and the sense of white entitlement emanating from it, the issue raised by the letter was far from trivial: resorting to anger could have disruptive effects on the feminist movement and end up harming all its members. Why not expressing criticisms in a more conciliatory and gradualist tone?

The letter must have greatly influenced Lorde, in whose archive several photocopied exemplars of it can be found[576]. During the following year, she broadened and deepened her understanding on anger, also refusing to take part in conferences where she would have been in an analogous situation. In June 1981, she finally felt ready to share her reflections on this feeling on the occasion of a meeting of the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) in Storrs, Connecticut. That time racism had been chosen, following her suggestion, as the main topic of the event.

What is hardly ever remembered is that Lorde arranged for her speech, which was the most anticipated of the day, to follow the remarks of a long-time friend of hers, Adrienne Rich. An accomplished poet, experienced activist and out-of-the-closet lesbian, Rich was in some ways Lorde's white alter ego – and as such lent herself little to accusations of victimhood in matters of racial discrimination. Rich chose to focus her brief address on the notion of disobedience, arguing that the time had come for the NSWA to ask itself "the extent to which she has, in the past decade, matured into the dutiful daughter of the white, patriarchal university"[577]. Rich was not advocating for the adoption of a

[575] Lester C. Olson, "Anger Among Allies: Audre Lorde's 1981 Keynote Admonishing the National Women's Studies Association", in *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97(3), 2011, p. 293.
[576] Ibid.
[577] Adrienne Rich, "Disobedience Is What NWSA Is Potentially About", in *Women's Studies Quarterly* 9(3), 1981, p. 4.

self-flagellating mentality, but for a more realistic approach to structural injustice: engaging in particular anti-racist initiatives did not erase at once the complicity of white feminists with the structurally racist society where they were born and raised, nor did it exempt them from the need to cultivate the art of disobedience unceasingly[578]. In other words, Rich's remarks highlighted how white women in the United States had been educated from the beginning to act *themselves* as the master's tools. Rebelling against such a condition required reclaiming oneself as the *user* of one's life, fighting the heteropatriarchal *abuse* which only sees women as tools in men's hands.

Rich's reflections resonate with Virno's emphasis on maintaining a critical distance from our own existence. It is in this connection that he introduces the notion of *use of life*, which he explicitly links to Foucault's reinterpretation of *ἐπιμέλεια ἑαυτοῦ*[579]:

> The use of the self is founded on a detachment from oneself. It takes root in our non-adherence to the environment where we are nonetheless situated […]. To use my existence, I have to not always identify with it. Only a life that I do not fully possess and which, while certainly not foreign to me, is not fully familiar either, can be used[580].

Rich, who was well-known for her long-time militancy for Black women's rights, offered her audience the coordinates of what we may call a *feminist care of the self*, of an unremitting praxis that, unlike the Cynical one, had as its ultimate goal not the attainment of some purported autonomy from the external world, but the most intense understanding possible (an *erotic* understanding, in Lorde's words) of the inescapable interdependence binding us to this very world that we share:

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[578] Ibid., p. 6.

[579] Virno, "L'uso della vita", p. 121.

[580] Ibid., pp. 122-123. It is important to note that this idea does not imply a strongly autonomous conception of the self – quite the contrary. When I try to make use of my own life, I experience the very same attrition that is always generated by the contact between myself and a given tool that I use. The subject who uses herself is only slightly detached from her own life, still finding herself at a distance from where she would never be independent from it. Freedom, in this view, is that narrow gap between one's self and one's life that we sometimes manage to keep temporarily open – the same gap which allows for the possibility of the care of the self.

I think we need to get rid of the useless baggage that says that by opposing racist violence, by doing anti racist work, or by becoming feminists, white women somehow cease to carry racism within us. […] Feminism became a political and spiritual base from which I could move to examine rather than try to hide my own racism, recognize that I have antiracist work to do continuously within myself. Increasingly, the writings of contemporary lesbian and feminist women of color have moved and challenged me to push my horizons further, examine with fresh eyes the world I thought I knew and took for granted[581].

Such an introduction allowed Lorde to start her speech without hesitation: "My response to racism is anger"[582]. She went on affirming that women had nothing to learn from fearing anger, but should instead embrace it – not least because anger had been until that point a tool of the master:

Women responding to racism means women responding to anger; the anger of exclusion, of unquestioned privilege, of racial distortions, of silence, ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, betrayal, and cooptation[583].

Lorde situated with clarity the origin of women's fear of anger in the constant threat of aggression that they experience under patriarchy: "In the male construct of brute force, we were taught that our lives depended upon the good will of patriarchal power. The anger of others was to be avoided at all costs". Nonetheless, she pointed out the self-defeating logic behind such a fear: "if we accept our powerlessness, then of course any anger can destroy us"[584]. Far from being only a source of destruction and injustice, anger can also be productive: mirroring her previous description of the erotic as a "source of power and information"[585], Lorde presented anger as "loaded with information and energy"[586]. In order to put such an energy at the service of "progress" and radical

[581] Rich, "Disobedience Is What NWSA Is Potentially About", p. 6.
[582] Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" [1981], in *Sister Outsider*, p. 117.
[583] Ibid.
[584] Ibid, p. 124.
[585] Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic", p. 43.
[586] Lorde, "The Uses of Anger", p. 121.

"change", anger should be "focused with precision"[587] – she claimed in what can be considered the first account of a ballistics of anger. Like the feminist militants of Cell-16 mentioned in Chapter 2, Lorde was aware that "unexpressed anger" can become as dangerous as "an undetonated device", but she added a further, anti-racist twist: that device was usually "hurled at the first woman of Color who talks about racism"[588].

Here we can find her response to the letter received two years earlier: repressing anger is pointless, because sooner or later it will result in a "detonation" that does not contemplate "precision" among its usage modes. To avoid the risk of moralism highlighted in the letter, Lorde opposed anger to guilt[589], which "all too often […] is just a name for impotence, for defensiveness destructive of communication"[590] – in other words, for a pornographic negation of the erotic. Lorde was explicit about her unwillingness to hide her anger to spare white feminists guilt[591], but she also argued that the goal of a radical use of anger should be "corrective surgery, not guilt"[592]. Fully embracing an erotic approach, she made herself vulnerable to and ready to learn from other women's anger: "The woman of Color who is not Black and who charges me with rendering her invisible by assuming that her struggles with racism are identical with my own has something to tell me that I had better learn from"[593].

Lester Olson notes that, within her speech, Lorde adopted a rhetorical technique that he calls *shifting subjectivities*, in which:

> An advocate articulates a shift in the second persona of an address, wherein the auditors or readers occupy one kind of role initially and then, drawing on what is remembered or learned from that position, are repositioned subsequently into a different role that is harder for them to recognize or occupy, but that might possess some transforming power. Initially, for example, Lorde focused on her

[587] Ibid., p. 120.
[588] Ibid.
[589] We will return to this important notion in the following chapter.
[590] Ibid., p. 123.
[591] Ibid.
[592] Ibid., p. 117.
[593] Ibid., p. 121.

women allies' first-hand experiences of oppression under patriarchy to help them subsequently to recognize their own roles as oppressors in similar practices across differences of race and sexuality[594].

While this is certainly correct, what makes Lorde's address an instance of parrhesia is something deeper, namely the application of that shifting *also to herself*: by describing herself as the potential addressee of legitimate feminist anger, she was stepping back from the position of the accuser that she was criticised for in 1979, and adopted a truly dialectical stance. In this move, we can find both an iteration of Cynicism and a development of it. One the one hand, the Ancient Cynics were famous for doing what they preached, acting as living examples of their uncompromising social and ethical critique – Lorde may thus be seen as doing something similar in making herself vulnerable to the same feminist anger she was advocating for. On the other hand, she was ready to admit that fighting against overlapping forms of structural injustice is a complex and messy activity – so complex and so messy that nobody could in good faith be always sure of being on the right side, as the Cynics did. In Ancient Greece, social life might have been simple enough for the Cynical call to refuse unjust and arbitrary norms to be immediately understandable: what they were urging their fellows to do was quite transparent. Modern societies, for their part, are characterised by often intricate power relationships, which even the most uncompromising critic would not be able to unpack by herself. Lorde can therefore also be described as questioning the Cynical anthropology of self-sufficiency and offering a more nuanced, feminist anthropology based on our constant, erotic openness to others.

How then – the reader may ask at this point – had anger to be used within the feminist movement? What was Lorde proposing her audience to do? While "The Uses of Anger" is a passionate speech and not the analytic exposition of a political theory, her overall perspective emerges from it quite clearly. Anger "between peers" or "allies" is an antidote to the misrecognition of differences within the feminist movement – the

[594] Olson, "Anger Among Allies", pp. 296-297.

differences stemming from racialization being a case in point[595]. Its aims are mutual learning and radical social and personal change, not "guilt" and "defensiveness"[596]. As such, anger should not be purposeless or unconstrained, but ballistically precise:

> The angers between women will not kill us if we can articulate them with precision, if we listen to the content of what is said with at least as much intensity as we defend ourselves against the manner of saying. […] I have tried to learn my anger's usefulness to me, as well as its limitations[597]. […] The angers of women can transform difference through insight into power. For anger between peers births change, not destruction, and the discomfort and sense of loss it often causes is not fatal, but a sign of growth[598].

In other words, Lorde was hoping for the creation of an *ecology of anger*: the women's movement had to become an environment within which it was safe to voice one's anger – a *safe* space allowing the erotic *unsafety* coming from sororal disagreement and even conflict. To better define her proposal, she returned several times on the difference between anger as a master's tool and the kind of anger she was advocating for. The former, she argued, can easily turn into hatred – a feeling portrayed as "very different" from "women's anger". Hatred belongs to "those who do not share our goals", its objects are death and destruction[599]. While anger can provide valuable information and ignite difficult but necessary conversations, Lorde described hatred as having nothing to say, almost self-evident in its destructive "fury"[600]. Those who hate "women, people of Color, lesbians and gay men, poor people" have no interest in beginning a dialogue, let

[595] Lorde, "The Uses of Anger" pp. 121; 122.
[596] Ibid., pp. 117,;123.
[597] In fact, Lorde focused at length on those limitations in her later "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger" [1983], in *Sister Outsider*, pp. 141-172. However, the focus of that essay is not anger at structural injustice, but the anger that Black women use against one another as a consequence of internalised racism – for this reason, I will not analyze it in this dissertation.
[598] "The Uses of Anger", p. 124.
[599] Ibid., p. 122.
[600] Ibid.

alone an erotic one – they believe to have nothing to learn from the people whom they hate[601].

The 1981 speech was better received than the previous one, but it did not convince all those present[602]. Lorde's and Rich's arguments were well-crafted, and the idea of a specific use of anger within movements struggling against structural forms of injustice couldn't but sound plausible to those facing multiple injustices at the same time. The feeling, however, was that the use of anger reclaimed by Lorde would have worked mainly in small groups already sharing a strong "erotic" dimension. What about, broader, formalised contexts – such as academia, to which the majority of the NWSA members belonged? A potential problem here lies in the fact that contemporary academia encourages the development of an ecology of anger even less that it did at beginning of the 1980s. Nonetheless, Lorde could reply by saying that this is one more reason for radically changing academia[603], rather than for dismissing the recurse to anger among allies – indeed, it may well be that the women academics in her audience did non perceive one another as allies. In the end, we always seem to return to the erotic dimension and the way it allows to deal with interpersonal differences: an anger addressed with precision can stimulate the production of an erotic bond between two or more people, but for the erotic dialogue to continue we would also need further, collective resources.

The issue on which the previous chapter ended – who will be able to practice radical anger? – re-appears now in a new, collective guise. It is true that social movements with an intense shared life look as a the right context to make the use of anger against political *enemies* and unjust *social structures* easier and less dangerous for the individuals involved than the charismatic model of leadership embodied by Malcolm X - not to speak of Solanas' "lonely killjoy" one. Nonetheless, building movements both wide enough to encompass the "differences" highlighted by Lorde and characterised by a

[601] Ibid., 122-124.

[602] Olson, "Anger Among Allies" pp. 301-302.

[603] I will return to this important issue in the next chapter.

level of mutuality and empathy sufficient for a constructive use of anger also among *allies* is not an easy task. Even when such movements exist, many people may not have the possibility of participating in their activities to the point of developing an "erotic" bond with their comrades, for all sorts of reasons (living in small towns which don't have a local chapter or affinity group in their vicinities; grave health conditions and/or disabilities; neurodiversity; caring responsibilities, etc.). In order to work properly, an ecology of anger would then require not just a single, safe environment where anger among peers can be a productive force, but a network of different spaces and temporalities. Ambitious at this may sound, we should not despair about the possibility of practicing radical anger in less-than-ideal circumstances – as those that Lorde faced both before and after her 1981 speech.

Audre Lorde and Us

In the mid-fifties, having recently run away from home, Lorde found employment as a manual labourer in a quartz crystal processing factory, Keystone Electronics, whose workforce was almost entirely African American and Puerto Rican. No one mentioned to her that the X-ray machines she worked on could have carcinogenic effects[604]. It is impossible to know whether there was a direct connection between the two events, but in 1979 Lorde was diagnosed with breast cancer, which would shortly after lead to a mastectomy. In 1984 she developed liver cancer, from which she eventually died in 1992. Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* contain, among other things, a meditation on the difficulty of politically aiming one's anger while ill – that is, in a condition that did not allow her to work for long periods, nor to travel around the country for feminist conferences and assemblies as she usually did:

[604] Lorde, *Zami*, p. 126.

I want to write rage but all that comes is sadness. We have been sad long enough to make this earth either weep or grow fertile. I am an anachronism, a sport, like the bee that was never meant to fly. Science sad so. I am not supposed to exist. I carry death around in my body like a condemnation. But I do live. The bee flies. There must be some way to integrate death into living, neither ignoring it nor giving to it[605].

As a Black homosexual woman living in the US, Lorde had always known to belong to those who "were never meant to survive"[606]. Her erotic anger against injustice had represented a powerful and productive way to reclaim her right to existence even in an environment trying to deny it – but then a devastating illness drained her energy and put her very life at stake. She still felt rage – she wanted to write about it – but, entrapped in a hospital bed, she was not able to do it.

In a diary entry written two months later, in January 1980, Lorde described how her "work" and "love for women" were keeping her alive. Recognizing "the existence of love", i.e. the erotic bonds she had with the many people who cared for and helped her during those years, made an "answer to despair" possible[607]. In July of the same year, she formulated in its most poetical form the same idea that we found expressed by Silvia Federici in Chapter 2: in the long run, no fight against structural injustice can survive without joy, and even radical anger requires to make room for the erotic during one's fight to change the world:

I have found that battling despair does not mean closing my eyes to the enormity of the tasks of effecting change, nor ignoring the strength and barbarity of the forces aligned against us. It means teaching, surviving and fighting with the most important resource I have, myself, and taking joy in the battle. It means, for me […] knowing that my work is part of a continuum of women's work, of reclaiming this earth and our power, and knowing that this work did not begin with my birth nor will it end with my death[608].

[605] Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, p. 5.
[606] Audre Lorde, "A Litany for Survival" [1978], in Ead., *The Collected Poems*, pp. 255-256.
[607] Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, p. 6.
[608] Ibid., p. 10.

The shared, militant joy which Malcolm X may have found only during his last year and that Solanas experienced at best occasionally, is presented by Lorde as something that, if one is part of an erotic network of relationships[609], can be preserved even in the direst moments. The awareness that in her fight against injustice there was still room for shared joy allowed her to accept that she did not need to see the end of the fight for her contribution to it to be meaningful. In a sense, in the erotic experience of sharing, she found that "way to integrate death into living" that she had been looking for since her first cancer diagnosis.

With time, Lorde became able to write and speak about anger better than ever: as we know, she pronounced her speech on the uses of anger in June 1981, more than one year after the diary entry in which she lamented her inability to "write rage". The woman offering her explosive remarks at the NWSA conference had already been through one of the most difficult periods of her life, during which she had benefitted enormously from a support-network made of both Black and white women – not least her partner at the time, Dr. Frances Louise Clayton. Having experienced on her own skin that radical anger relied on the erotic sharing of joy, she did not retreat from her belief that anger between allies can be useful and even necessary – quite the contrary. It would perhaps be unfair to expect that, even within groups fighting against structural injustices, many people would be ready to criticize their comrades and allies as harshly as Lorde did – even more so in the still precarious health conditions she endured at the time. However, the very difficulty of a critique of that kind and the courage of truth it requires imply that it must be taken seriously. At the same time, it is easy to imagine how a critical posture of that kind may go awry: activists may end up unloading on other components of their movement an anger whose roots lie elsewhere, with potentially disruptive effects. In this connection, the importance of Lorde's explicit acceptance of her own vulnerability in the face of her sisters' anger cannot be emphasized enough: among

[609] What she called "a network of woman support" (*The Cancer Journals*, p. 22).

allies, there can be no good criticism without an openness to self-criticism (which should not be confused with self-guilt). Lorde herself returned on this point in the following years.

In 1986, when she already knew that her liver cancer might give her only a few more years to live, she stressed the importance of "learning to recognize and label [one's] angers" while addressing a meeting of Black lesbian and gay parents: before screaming at one's children ,it would be better to ask oneself whether the anger one feels comes just from the children's behaviour or is rather the product of a previous repression of the anger felt at an injustice experienced as a Black homosexual person[610]. What Lorde taught her children was how to "handle anger"[611] in a constructive way: "not to deny it or hide it or self-destruct upon it"[612]. Significantly, she described the process of creating a (miniaturized) ecology for her children's anger: "[Frances and I] also had to provide them with sufficient space within which to feel anger, fear, rebellion, joy"[613]. Since the practice of radical anger implies a constant process of "labeling" and a relentless ballistic exercise, developing relatively safe contexts for its expression is likely to bring about also an improvement in its "handling". In any case, the uses of anger cannot be thought of in the abstract: it is now time to analyse instances of radical anger that are still in the making.

[610] Audre Lorde, "Turning the Beat Around: Lesbian Parenting" [1986], in Ead., *I Am Your Sister. Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, p. 76.
[611] A phrase that calls to mind the connection between *use* and *touch*.
[612] Ibid., p. 77.
[613] Ibid., p.

Chapter 7. Shouting Loudly and Fiercely: The Lessons of Ni Una Menos - Non Una Di Meno

The Collective Practice and Theory of Radical Anger Today. Notes on Method

The previous three chapters offered us the insights and the teachings of three great examples of radical anger. As anticipated in the Introduction, their relative closeness – in terms of both space and time – represents an advantage when it comes to the stability of the meaning attributed to the very notion of "anger" they were invoking. By marking the trajectories of emotional communities in no way unrelated to one another – early radical feminism, the avantgarde art scene, radical antiracism, Black feminism, lesbian activism, religious radicalism, anti-capitalist groups, breast cancer survivors just to name a few -, Valerie Solanas, Malcolm X and Audre Lorde showed us the special power of their respective uses of anger while at the same time giving a hint of their possible combinations. It is surely not a coincidence that Solanas happened to be an antiracist and that she was openly compared to Malcolm for her radicality[614]. Nor was Lorde's admiration for the former NOI minister a mystery[615]. On the other hand, one may wonder whether the chronological and geographical proximity of these figures also proves that the radical anger they were embodying and theorizing was something possible only in a very specific place for a fairly short period. To put it differently: isn't today their political radicalism just a relic of a forever gone age of protest and experimentation?

Nowadays, many seem to believe that radical social change is an intrinsically minoritarian aspiration – that all real, lasting change happens gradually and can take place only when the purportedly "moderate", centrist majority is not scared by it. The

[614] Fahs, *Valerie Solanas*, pp. 178-179; 268-269.
[615] Lorde, "Learning from the 60s", pp. 129-133.

fact that, in the meantime, the so-called "centre" has become in several countries a bastion of neoliberal extremism[616] does not bother the proponents of this view too much. If all political ideas can ultimately be tested, as Schmitt famously wrote, accordingly to the anthropology that "they consciously or unconsciously presuppose"[617], the current hostility towards radical politics relies on a grim depiction of human beings as largely indifferent to politics, cognitively limited, short-sighted and self-interested[618] – an image that goes hand in hand with the dismissal of feelings as irrational and dangerous in the political realm which we critically analysed in the Introduction. In such a scenario, talks of radical anger would purportedly appeal to scant, extremist groups with no actual political standing.

However, this narrative contrasts starkly with the recent emergence, in a number of considerably different countries, of a trans-feminist movement[619] able to combine

[616] Cf. Tariq Ali, *The Extreme Centre. A Second Warning*, Verso, London 2018, 2nd edition. Ali's analysis focuses especially on the UK, France, Germany and the US. While Ali coined the phrase, the idea of an "extreme centre" incorporating the remnants of both the left and the old conservative right into a sort of neoliberal consensus is surely older and probably dates back to the ascent of Tony Blair in the UK. In 2005, Mark Fisher gave us perhaps the best formulation of what living under the hegemony of the extreme centre means: "There are still those who would like to pretend that a Tory administration would be so much worse than New Labour, so that deigning to vote for anyone else would be an 'indulgence'. Choosing 'the least worst' is not making this particular choice, it is also choosing a system which forces you to accept the least worst as the best you can hope for" ("Don't vote, don't encourage them" [2005], in Mark Fisher, *K-punk. The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher* (2004-2016), edited by Darren Ambrose, Repeater, London 2018, p. 429). From a more theoretical angle, one may also wonder whether the very notion of a "centre" hides anti-political (or at least anti-democratic) implications. Jacques Rancière's poignant criticism of Aristotle's reduction of the political *centre* to the *middle* class can be read precisely in this way: the Aristotelian suggestion according to which the city's institutions (the political centre) should mainly rely on the middle class (the social "middle" or "mean") neglects "the fact that the mean never suffices to occupy the centre". The concept of the "Centre", then, can be identified with a peculiar "conception of the political space, the free development of a consensual force adequate to the free and apolitical production and circulation": by controlling the political centre, the middle class is supposed to mediate any tension between the upper and the lower classes, therefore banishing conflict from the political sphere. Unfortunately – Rancière remarks- "there is no class whose mere presence or absence can pacify the sphere of the political or block all approaches to it" (See Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics* [1992], trans. by L. Heron, Verso, London 2007, pp. 6; 14-17).

[617] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 58.

[618] One of the main consequences usually drawn from these anthropological assumptions is that some form of minority rule would be preferable to democracy. With explicit arguments in favour of aristocracy and oligarchy largely fallen out of fashion, in recent years the old idea of the "rule of the wise" or "epistocracy" has significantly regained traction in some academic quarters. However, this body of work has been rejected even on its own terms (that is, even by those who take epistemological arguments as key for legitimizing democratic rule): see Robert E. Goodin, Kay Spiekermann, *An Epistemic Theory of Democracy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018, esp. chap. 15.

[619] I.e. a feminist movement that does not discriminate against trans women and promotes trans liberation.

radicalism with mass mobilization[620]. More generally, several authors have spoken of an ongoing feminist tide encompassing also activists, like the members of the women's militia in Kurdish Rojava, who do not fully identify with (the Eurocentric legacy of) feminism as commonly understood in "Western" countries[621]. Although these are not the only recent cases in which radical anger has been used as a political tool, they are perhaps the most underestimated, whose practical and theoretical potential is still to be recognized. In this chapter, I will deal in particular with the Ni Una Menos – Non Una di Meno (henceforth NUdM) movement, and more specifically with its Argentinian and Italian chapters.

Nevertheless, reflecting on the contribution that a social movement may offer to a political philosophy of anger requires several methodological precautions – even more so since NUdM is a "leaderless movement", which has neither a formal hierarchy nor an official spokesperson[622]. Indeed, even for those who – following Hadot - adopt a definition of philosophy in the light of which a given *discourse* can never be considered in isolation from the corresponding *life choice*, it is not easy to translate these concepts in the plural: whose lives and whose discourses should we take into account when speaking of a movement? The difficulty is increased by the fact that a lasting tradition in political thought sees theory as something that guides or evaluates praxis from up above – within political philosophy it is certainly more frequent to ask whether a certain social movement acted in the right way, or to say what it should do to promote certain values or goals, rather than explaining what its theoretical contribution is. The remaining part of this section will therefore deal with these methodological issues, following in

[620] Verónica Gago, *Feminist International. How to Change Everything*, trans. by L. Mason-Deese, Verso, New York 2020, p. 4. On the increasing radicality of contemporary feminism, see also Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*, Verso, New York 2019.

[621] See Federica Tourn, "Intervista con Amara Dorşîn", in Ead., *Rovesciare il mondo. I movimenti delle donne e la politica*, Aut Aut, Palermo 2020, especially pp. 257-261. On the same topic, see also Dilar Dirik, "The Revolution of Smiling Women. Stateless democracy and power in Rojava", in Olivia U. Rutazibwa, Robbie Shilliam (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Postcolonial Politics*, Routledge, London 2018, pp. 222-238.

[622] This is a feature of many social movements that have emerged in recent years. In the words of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "the lack of leaders in the movements today is neither accidental nor isolated: hierarchical structures have been overturned and dismantled within the movements as a function of both the crisis of representation and a deep aspiration to democracy" (*Assembly*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017, p. 8).

the footsteps of Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who in the last decade has developed a social epistemology which devotes a particular attention to the relationship between academics and radical social movements.

Santos's main polemical target is what he describes as "vanguard theory", which "does not let itself to be taken by surprise or feel wonderment. Whatever does not fit the vanguardist's previsions or propositions either does not exist or is not relevant"[623]. While liberal thinkers like Rawls may fall within such a definition, Santos explicitly focuses on theories presenting themselves as radical or even revolutionary, which actually aspire to orient political action (they are *vanguardist* not only because they put the needs of a given theoretical vision before anything else, but also because their authors feel, or want to feel, in the political frontlines, just one step behind political leaders themselves). In his view, these theories experience nowadays a crisis that brings to the fore their Eurocentric and colonialist biases:

> While Eurocentric critical theory and left politics were historically developed in the global North, indeed in only five or six countries of the global North (Germany, England, France, Russia, Italy and, to a smaller extent, the United States), the most innovative and effective transformative left practices of recent decades […] have been occurring in the global South. The Western critical tradition developed in the light of the perceived needs and aspirations of European oppressed classes, not in the light of those of the oppressed classes of the world at large[624].

A significant element within this crisis is for Santos the growing academic entrenchment of "Eurocentric critical theory", whose exponents mostly "work in institutions such as universities that require protective hats and gloves to deal with reality" - Western modernity, in other words, allows its intellectuals "only to produce revolutionary ideas in reactionary institutions"[625]. Santos' extended work on the university as an institution

[623] Boaeventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South. Justice Against Epistemicide*, Paradigm. Boulder 2014, p. 11.
[624] Ibid., p. 40.
[625] Ibid., p. 3.

offers a nuanced critique, out of which I would like to extrapolate three claims. First of all, there is no Edenic pre-neoliberal university to safeguard or resurrect, least of all in the so-called Western countries: contemporary universities need to be decolonised and de-patriarchalised no less than the knowledge taught within them needs to be de-commodified. Pursuing one goal without the others would not be possible, as the structural injustices at stake are intermingled[626]. Secondly, it is not sure that these three goals will be attainable by "building the counteruniversity inside the [existing] university" – a scenario which Santos refers to as the creation of a *pluriversity*[627]. It may also be the case that a new, radically different type of institution has to be promoted: the *subversity*, which is based on a "pedagogy of conflict" and has the expressed aim of spreading knowledges "capable of potentiating indignation and rebellion"[628]. Finally, there is no reason to consider universities in general as privileged sites for the social sciences and humanities[629] – even worse, they are often places where knowledge is as much produced as it is destroyed, for example by discarding those forms of knowledge that do not meet the criteria to be deemed "academic"[630]. These three claims do not imply that academics should leave their jobs *en masse*, but that they should develop an attitude towards their professional activity that is both strategic (working in a neoliberal university may just be a way of providing for oneself while producing and spreading other forms of knowledge in non-academic contexts) and self-critical (of the university professors who may be willing to join the subversity, Santos significantly writes that "they must undergo a complex process of pedagogical unlearning" in order to see "the university aura as a burden rather than an asset")[631]. These reflections open the way for

[626] Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Decolonising the University: The Challenge of Deep Cognitive Justice*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle 2017, chap. 6.
[627] Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire. The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South*, Duke University Press, Durham 2018, p. 281.
[628] Ibid.
[629] On natural sciences see Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, chap. 1.
[630] Cf. Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, pp.12, 14.
[631] Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, p. 284.

a type of theorizing that stands in polemical opposition to any vanguardist temptation: *rearguard theory*, a

> theoretical work that follows and shares the practices of social movements very closely, raising questions, establishing synchronic and diachronic comparisons, symbolically enlarging such practices by means of articulations, translations, and possible alliances with other movements, providing contexts, clarifying or dismantling normative injunctions, facilitating interactions with those who walk more slowly, and bringing in complexity when actions seem rushed and unreflective and simplicity when action seems self-paralyzed by reflection. The grounding ideas of a rearguard theory are craftsmanship rather than architecture, committed testimony rather than clairvoyant leadership, and intercultural approximation to what is new for some and very old for others[632].

I have been significantly influenced and inspired by such a conception in my own research on NUdM, but it is important to note from the beginning that the very life of this movement challenges Santos' notion of rearguard theory in a constructive way. Indeed, speaking of a rear-guard still implies a sort of division on labour within social movements (i.e., the presence of a vanguard and, within that, of a leadership). One does not need to imagine such a division as a hierarchical one (according to which, for example, those who are in the vanguard would be more important for the movement than those who are, so to speak, in the back benches) to see it as potentially problematic: why should people even become specialized in doing just one thing (e.g., theorizing vs. representing the movement at a press conference)? A leaderless movement like NUdM, which has the assembly as its key institution, challenges the very notions of rear and front, and within its chapters intellectuals can be found in all sort of roles, some more visible and others more peripheral. As a trans-feminist movement, NUdM is composed by activists who have often lacked recognition *both* in the back *and* in the front, as theorists and as militants: from their perspective, the sheer articulation of such terms as one being alternative to the other already looks as an unacceptable limitation.

[632] Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, p. 44.

Nonetheless, intellectuals who are part of NUdM can also be said to engage in exactly the kind of enterprise that Santos calls rearguard theory: they don't necessarily want to renounce, *in their activist capacity*, to the eventuality of being in the political frontlines; on the other hand, they are aware that, *in their scholarly capacity*, they have to operate as if they were physically in the back, because that is the only way to theorise about and from within social movements without indulging in paternalism and/or romanticization. This epistemological humility is especially important for a discipline like political philosophy, which is not at ease in dealing with movements.

In my approach to NUdM I had, however, to do something slightly different from the amended rearguard theory deployed by the intellectuals who are part of it. As a cis male writing in 2023 of a trans-feminist movement, I experience a kind of myopia that no amount of study or participant observation would be able to heal. If, however, I venture into a series of reflections on (and starting from) NUdM, it is not only because of the contribution that this movement has arguably provided to a political philosophy of radical anger, but also because I believe, following Sally Haslanger, that philosophical theorizing on feminism should not become the intellectual equivalent of that reproductive work so unequally distributed on the basis of gender[633]. In trying to do so, I relied on three kinds of *discourses* (to borrow Hadot's term): written testimonies and analyses from Argentinian and Italian members of NUdM (both academics and non-academics); documents and statements collectively authored by NUdM; extended discussions and conversations with feminist activists and intellectuals, many of whom involved in NUdM themselves[634]. The same sources, especially the third and first ones, helped me to figure out the form of *life* that NUdM both exemplifies and prefigures. It is therefore apparent that I choose for myself a point of view placed, in some respects,

[633] Sally Haslanger, "Changing the Ideology and Culture of Philosophy. Not by Reason (Alone)", in in *Hypatia* 23(2), 2008, p. 219.

[634] It is probably impossible to remember them all, but I want to express my deepest gratitude to Caterina Peroni, Carla Panico, Maria Edgarda Marcucci, Federica Rosin and all the members of NUdM in Turin, Marta Sottoriva, Martina Neglia, Mackda Ghebremariam Tesfaù, Ilaria Leccardi, Rossella Puca, Federica Merenda, Sofia Torre, Rachele Cinerari, Elisatron, Anna Loretoni, Giuseppe Aprile, and Lorenzo Mari.

even more rearward than the rear-guard. I did so in the belief that a good political philosophy of anger, especially one produced by a single scholar, has more to do with translation than with originality – a mythological entity in which only academics could believe in the first place. Acting as a translator inevitably means exposing oneself to the risk, sometimes even the certainty, of also being a traitor. But what is doing philosophy in the wake of the Cynics, if not a restless enterprise of risk-taking?

In the next section, I will provide a first overview of the role played by anger in NUdM's politics in Argentina, while also making explicit the relationship between feminist anger and the *feminist strike* (the main form of mobilization practiced by this movement). In Sousa Santos' terms, this section will deal mainly with testimony, translation and articulation.

The following two sections will then gravitate around two experiments in diachronic comparison. The first one will stage a dialogue between the influential view of the general strike formulated by Walter Benjamin at the beginning of the 1920s and NUdM's *feminist strike*, showing the latter's theoretical depth and practical effectiveness. The final section will then continue the conversation between Benjamin and NUdM, shedding light on the movement's multidimensional approach to existing legal systems and showing how radical anger can function as an antidote against victimization.

An Angry Strike at the Heart of Patriarchy

The slogan "Not one woman less, not a single more death" was coined in 1995 by the Mexican poet and activist Susana Chavez Castillo in response to the high number of femicides committed over the two previous years in her hometown, Ciudad Juarez[635].

[635] The hundreds of femicides registered in this Mexican town, whose perpetrators remained mostly unidentified and unpunished, made some journalists and scholars speak of a "femicide machine". See Sergio González Rodriguez, *The Femicide Machine*, Semiotext(e), South Pasadena 2012.

Castillo herself was killed by the members of a gang in 2011 - a tragic confirmation of the fact that the place where she lived had not become safer for women in the meantime.[636]. Four years later a nascent Argentinian feminist movement, which paved the way for the emergence of analogous organizations in a number of other countries after 2016, decided to pay homage to Castillo by adopting her most famous verse as its name. Ni Una Menos started from the realization that femicides were increasing both in number and in brutality, but it differed sharply from the previous public displays of mourning. Rather than torch-lit processions or silent vigils, its activists expressed a strong dose of anger which, once shared, seemed to multiply to the point of becoming at times, in line with Lorde's teachings, an eruption into euphoric joy.

Some of the earliest and most influential organisers of the Argentinian movement, such as Verónica Gago and María Pia López, identify anger as a feeling capable of activating the political energy latent in mourning, which acts as a necessary but not sufficient condition: the transition from the latter to the former implies a work of translation of private wounds into public demands[637]. Such an angry component is expressed through a multiplicity of practices: in Argentina, the *cacerolazo*, a form of deafening protest in which pots and pans are used as drums, is adopted on a large scale[638], while in Italy activists take over the city space with initiatives such as the one against the statue of Indro Montanelli mentioned in the Introduction, all the while chanting: "Noi siamo/il grido/altissimo e feroce/di tutte quelle donne/che più non hanno voce" (We are/the shout /loud and fierce /of all those women /who no longer have a voice).

In Chile, a performance entitled *Un violador en tu camino* (*A rapist on your way*), created by the LASTESIS collective and soon become the unofficial anthem of NUdM, harshly criticized the law enforcement agencies, the judiciary and the Chilean state itself after the appalling cases of gender violence happened at the hands of the police during

[636] Natalia Brizuela e Leticia Sabsay, "Foreword" in María Pia López, *Not One Less. Mourning, Disobedience and Desire*, Polity, Cambridge 2020, p. xi.

[637] Cf. Gago, *Feminist International*, pp. 10, 23, 44; López, *Not One Less*, p. 144.

[638] Cf. Lucí Cavallero and Verónica Gago, *A Feminist Reading of Debt* [2019], trans. by L. Mason-Deese, Pluto Press, London 2021, pp. 15-16.

the repression of the October 2019 protests (aimed against the increased privatization of the welfare system decided by the government, then led by the billionaire Sebastián Piñera)[639]. Halfway between a song and a choreography, the performance showed already in its title the polemical inversion of a slogan of the Chilean police (*Un amigo en tu camino*, "A friend on your way") to claim that an appropriate response to gender violence could never take the form of a securitarian paternalism according to which women, conceived as weak subjects, should be defended by "well-meaning" men (i.e., cops) against "bad" ones. Against the hypocrisy of a patriarchal state, NUdM activists responded by pointing their fingers towards town halls, courts and police stations: "El violador eres tu!" ("You are the rapist!"), their eyes blindfolded as those of the women abused by police agents.

Created to popularize the anthropologist Rita Segato's reflections on the intrinsically political nature of femicide (which she conceives as a masculinist claim on the public space that needs to be periodically reiterated to consolidate patriarchy[640]), *Un violador en tu camino* is a perfect example of the angry overlap of theory and practice realized by NUdM: a work which can bring into the streets a form of artistic expression (performance art) usually confined within museums and fancy galleries, and that in so doing increases art's own potential as a tool for social critique[641]. In their political-poetical manifesto, LASTESIS devote to feminist anger a whole section - from which I would like to quote at length, since no paraphrase would do justice to its energy:

Rabies (*rabia*), in the animal kingdom, can be transmitted when an animal bites another on its neck. […] But to this innate and deadly ability to propagate an incurable disease, we can add another kind of anger (*rabia*). An anger that has been without cure for centuries. And which belongs to an archaic and rancid system that also attacks the body. Our bodies. It hurts, immobilises and kills us. We are

[639] Human Rights Watch, *Chile. Events of 2019*, available at: https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/chile#.

[640] Cf. Rita L. Segato, *La guerra contra las mujeres*, Traficantes de Sueños, Madrid 2016, p. 43.

[641] A detailed analysis of the performance, also dealing with its many versions and translations, can be found in Deborah Martin, Deborah Shaw, "Chilean and Transnational Performances of Disobedience. LasTesis and the Phenomenon of *Un violador en tu camino*", in *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 40 (5), 2021, pp. 712-729.

angry. Angry against millenary oppression. Angry against historical impunity. Angry and fearful of being attacked, murdered, forgotten. Patriarchy runs in the veins of governments and the powerful, in those of the media and the police. It runs through the different socio-economic sectors. It infiltrates the courts of law. [...] Everything that is touched by patriarchy turns into anger. We feel anger. Anger at the constant invisibilisation of the abuse on us. Why is it that almost every woman you know has been abused and men do not know a single abuser? Because they do not see him. Because from their privilege our blood is invisible.

[…] They steal everything from us, except anger. And our anger upsets them. They want us to continue to stay locked in our homes as if nothing were wrong. It bothers them that we go out in the streets with a blindfold over our eyes, dressed in light, provocative lingerie, to sing to them that they are the rapists. But we don't get tired of shouting. Until this anger is converted into revolution[642].

Here we have a clever and politically bold interpretation of many topics dealt with in the previous chapters. LASTESIS use the illness-metaphor couple in an evocative way, denouncing patriarchy as a deadly virus (which significantly affects, though in very different ways, both the abusers and the abused). This points to the fact that the injustice against which the Collective and NUdM militate is beyond any doubt a structural one, which "runs in the veins" of all institutions and has been reproducing itself "for centuries". Anger, however, is not always the same: feminist anger upsets the patriarchy, because it illuminates the possibility of a ballistics shooting in the opposite direction. Even under conditions of extreme injustice, the emergence of the anger of the oppressed cannot be completely averted: anger cannot be taken away from them because it is the very virus of injustice that keeps it alive as an eventual immune response. Converting anger into a revolution means stealing it from the master's house, making a feminist tool – an arm – out of it. Like Solanas, the members of LasTesis play with the polysemic nature of this feeling, invoking it against those very policemen who historically have been sent to repress enraged, "rabid" crowds.

[642] Colectivo LASTESIS, *Quemar el miedo*, Editorial Planeta Mexicana, Barcelona 2021, chap. 1.

This excerpt marks at the same time the challenge NUdM has to face: putting an end to a violence that, running deep into the veins of its perpetrators, sheds the blood of its victims as if it were invisible. In other words, in the light of its scepticism towards political and social institutions, one may ask what are the means that NUdM deploys to fight femicide and heteropatriarchy more generally. The key to understand the movement's strategy is, in this connection, the resignification of the concept of strike.

A *feminist strike* differs from the usual labour strike: it does not concern women belonging to given a factory, production sector or trade union. Rather, it is aimed at *all* women, cis and trans, whether in paid employment or not, unionised or not, whether wage labourers, housewives, students or pensioners - and therefore regardless of their possession of a legal right to strike. Such a strike is not merely an act of abstention from work, but it radically questions the meaning of *work* itself[643]. It certainly implies an interruption of *paid* work; but even more so it brings about a suspension of *social reproductive work* – that is, of all those (mostly unpaid) activities that enable a society to survive over time (childcare and education, care of the elderly, domestic hygiene, the preparation of meals, etc.) and that represent the condition of possibility of the same labour force that performs paid jobs. Not only are these reproductive tasks carried out in markedly unequal proportions by women within the domestic sphere but, in an economic system in which a family can hardly survive on less than two earners[644], they often add up to another, remunerated job which women have to find outside their home. Feminist activists and intellectuals have been researching these topics for many decades now, but it is not immediately clear why a movement born to fight femicide decided to pay so much attention to the economic dimension of patriarchal injustice. The answer lies in NUdM's specific analysis of gender violence, which links it inseparably to the transformations of capitalism. The model of the male breadwinner, prevalent (among

[643] Gago, *Feminist International*, p. 48.

[644] Cf. Nancy Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care", in *New Left Review* 100, 2016, pp. 99-117.

white people) in the context of Fordist capitalism[645], has now largely given way to a (heterosexual) family in which both spouses are in paid employment. While women's entry into paid work led to an increase in their economic self-sufficiency, such a tendency has gradually weakened with the rise of neoliberal capitalism, in which it is not women's jobs that resemble those of men, but rather the latter that are *feminised*: "the fragmentation of the service provided and the complexity of the dependence/absorption which women have experienced at various times in the labour market, ends up becoming a general paradigm"[646]. The consequences are twofold: it is difficult for a woman, who is systematically paid less than a man even on the same job[647], to achieve economic independence outside the "couple" (and therefore also to leave a violent partner); the male worker, no longer the sole income earner and holder of a more and more unsatisfactory job, sees his role as head of the family undermined. In fact, once the economic veneer is removed, what is left is only an arbitrary gender hierarchy, which is increasingly indefensible in an explicit way[648]. Once we add that a shrinking welfare state makes men, children and dependents increasingly in need of free reproductive work carried out largely by women, the critique of neoliberalism embodied by NUdM's feminist strike appears indeed timely and consistent with the movement's motives.

Men increasingly deprived of social recognition on their job are more inclined to see in their life as part of a heterosexual couple – and in the control over their partner – the

[645] While Fordism marked the period during which such a phenomenon was most common, its origins can be traced back in time to previous centuries – see for instance Silvia Federici, *Patriarchy of the Wage. Notes on Marx, Gender, and Feminism*, PM Press, Oakland 2021, chap. 6. The neoliberal (and neoconservative) attack on the family-wage model has been observed across many countries, not least the United States (Melinda Cooper, *Family Values. Between Neoliberalism and New Social Conservatism*, Zone Books, New York 2017, esp. chap. 2). At the same time, it is important to recognize that neoliberalism has taken different shapes in different national contexts. On Argentina, see especially Verónica Gago, *Neoliberalism from Below. Popular Pragmatics and Baroque Economics*, trans. by L. Mason-Deese, Duke University Press, Durham 2017.

[646] Cristina Morini, "The feminization of labour in cognitive capitalism", in *Feminist Review* 87 (1), 2007, p. 43.

[647] This is the so-called *gender wage gap*. For recent data on the UK, see e.g. Olivier Bargain, Karina Doorley, Philippe Van Kerm, "Minimum Wages and the Gender GAP in Pay: New Evidence from the United Kingdom and Ireland", in *The Review of Income and Wealth* 65(3), 2019, pp. 514-539.

[648] Gago, *Feminist International*, pp. 59-61.

only space left to affirm their supremacy. In the words of Carlotta Cossutta, academic philosopher and NUdM activist:

> In the rhetoric of the "love of my life", it is capitalism and patriarchy that meet and become allies, structuring our society in a profound and pervasive way. Killing one's partner while feeling that one is losing her, in fact, is not a crazy and unpredictable gesture, but the explosion, naked and raw, of this plot that allows one's fulfilment to be shifted from the world of work, where it seems almost impossible or where it is constantly frustrated, to the perfect couple, which turns its back on the whole world and creates that island of happiness that one would like to be unbreakable. And this kind of love is certainly a sick love, but it is a patriarchal pathology that is reinforced by economic crisis and by a capitalism that makes feelings a commodity and, at the same time, another proof of self-realisation[649].

In this context, NUdM activists reappropriate a notion – that of madness – which, as we saw in Chapter 2, radical feminists had already turned against the heteropatriarchal status quo: the man committing a femicide is not, most of the times, a mentally insane individual in the midst of a raptus, but rather – to use an expression popularized by NUdM, "a healthy son of patriarchy"[650].

We should not think, however, that NUdM embraces a narrowly economic view of gender violence, which would try to reduce all its "cultural" features to a "material" base. Indeed, for those who cannot join it otherwise the feminist strike is not *from* work, but *at* work: those who would risk to be fired if they did not show up, or who provide public services which they cannot suspend without dramatic consequences (think here of doctors and nurses), can show their solidarity in alternative ways – Argentinian cooks, to mention a famous example, strike by serving only raw food. Striking therefore also constitutes the assertion of one's own political subjectivity, the rejection of an

[649] Carlotta Cossutta, "Il feticismo dell'amore", in *Effimera*, 13/07/2016.

[650] Cf. Marta Lovato, Melania Pavan, "Nessun gigante buono, ma un figlio sano del patriarcato", in *Global Project*, 10/09/2019.

infantilising representation of women as bodies in need of (male) protection [651] – and not only a demand for better economic conditions.

Nonetheless, we still have to see how exactly a strike intends to produce a more feminist society: if it were simply a matter of addressing a list of grievances to the government of the day, the anger mobilised by NUdM against public institutions would remain largely symbolic, bringing the movement back into the realm of a fairly traditional reformism. Since I believe there is much more at stake, it may be useful to compare the notion of strike developed over the years by NUdM with a key text of twentieth-century political thought, in which the act of striking is radicalised as perhaps nowhere else - Walter Benjamin's *Toward the Critique of Violence*.

Feminist Strike or General Strike?

One of the reasons why Benjamin's essay is the perfect counterpoint to the notion of feminist strike is that the German philosopher, unlike NUdM, attributed to the right to strike (especially in the case of a *general strike*, aimed at the entire workforce) an ineradicable potential for violence. In his view, while the typical strike called by a trade union can very well be non-violent, exhausting itself in the suspension of work to force a given entrepreneur or group of entrepreneurs into accepting specific requests, the *revolutionary general strike* demands, for the resumption of normal operations, not a mere improvement of certain working conditions, but a change in the national economic and political structure. In such a scenario, for Benjamin the working class embodies an idea of the strike which is incompatible with that of the state, turning the right to strike into the "right to use violence for the implementation of certain ends". Moreover, he saw the *general* strike as *intrinsically* revolutionary: in fact, state institutions would inevitably respond to it by declaring that "a simultaneous exercise of the strike in all industries is illegal, since the particular grounds for the strike specified by the legislator

[651] Gago, *Feminist International*, pp. 40-41, 13.

cannot be present in all of them"[652]. The resulting picture is quite clear: if all workers (or at least a sufficiently high number of them) go on strike, the whole economic production would be paralyzed and the state would be unable to maintain public order for long. A spiral of violence would ensue, with state authorities trying to repress the strikers while the latter, in the light of their own conception of the general strike, would resort to force. If the workers were to prevail, theirs would be, in Benjamin's terms, a *law-positing violence*: having defeated the existing laws and institutions, they would to be able to create their own.

Here the philosopher appears to grasp a radical dimension of the strike which seems to elude the feminist one: the possibility of blocking everything, of putting the whole of society in check - opening the door to authentically revolutionary change. In Argentina, NUdM has recorded participation in the millions for its strikes, with hundreds of thousands of people taking to the streets: if there ever was a group capable of organising a nationwide blockade, it would be this one. Nonetheless, this movement has never called for a truly *general* strike: the invitation to join is extended to all women, but not to men – who can show their solidarity going to demonstrations, but who are not asked to strike[653]. At first, this seems a strategic mistake, a choice that privileges a sort of ideological purity (only women can be part of a *feminist* strike) at the expense of political effectiveness: if NUdM were able to convince enough men to join in the strike, the entire national economy would be stalled. At that point, the movement would be able to do more than just demanding something from the government: it would have the power to have its say on the composition and the agenda of the government itself, pushing the whole of society in a feminist direction.

If we have a closer look, however, it is Benjamin's vision that looks unrealistic. He never explained how a general strike could be kept going long enough to make the state vacillate. A first hypothesis is that he had in mind a war of attrition of sorts: workers

[652] Walter Benjamin, *Toward the Critique of Violence* [1921], in Id., *Toward the Critique of Violence. A Critical Edition*, edited by Peter Fenves and Julia Ng, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2021, p. 43.
[653] López, *Not One Less*, pp. 137-138.

would wait until the capitalists would be on their knees because of the lack of profits or even just of commodities to buy; capitalists, on the other hand, would do their best to bring the workers to the point of no longer being able to survive without a wage, forcing them to return to their jobs in order to avoid starvation. In this hypothetical context, the workers' chance to prevail would almost completely rely on the fact that a particular kind of activities would never stop – namely, women's social reproductive work. Indeed, what Benjamin had before his eyes was 1920 Germany, where the industrial workforce – not to speak of the unionized one – was largely male. Without or with little money to live on, it would have been women to find how to put a hot meal on the table, secure the necessary medicines for the elderly, and reassure children in the face of an increasingly tense and cramped everyday life. But once reproductive work enters the frame, the strikers' bet looks a lot riskier.

On the contrary, a feminist strike – which involves both production and reproduction from the very beginning – cannot ignore that no society would survive for long without someone to take over its reproductive tasks. Under a complete blockade, the most vulnerable would be the first to pay the consequences - for example, Argentinian neighbourhood canteens cannot avoid cooking for long without the people who use them, usually among the poorest, risking malnutrition. Women's labour - waged and unwaged, in and out of the domestic sphere - is so vital that even suspending it for just one day would entail no small logistical problems. It is precisely to emphasise this amount of work and its relation to gender that NUdM does not extend the call to strike to men - as if to say: "if we count so little as to be killed with impunity, try doing without us".

There is, however, another hypothesis to consider: Benjamin may have thought that the general strike would have led to a social crisis almost immediately. After all, capitalists were not inclined to tighten their belts and go long periods without enriching themselves: they would have immediately pressed for the state to intervene militarily to

restore the status quo. Consistently with Benjamin's view of power[654], this second scenario would be characterized by a certain one-dimensionality: the working class is supposed to move in unison and to be almost unanimously in favour of a revolutionary rupture; the capitalist class would purportedly act as a single individual, waiting not even a moment to go to a violent confrontation; state institutions, from parliament to bureaucracy, from the judiciary to the police and the army, are taken to be ready to obediently follow any request coming from the capitalists. None of these preconditions is particularly plausible: the working class would inevitably present divisions within itself, with some sectors being more cautious than others; capitalist entrepreneurs may follow different strategies (perhaps aiming to end strikes only in their own productive sector); the parliament and the other state apparatuses, not least the army, would likely show very different degrees of hostility toward the strikers, and so on.

Theoretical reflections on the notion of general strike, in Benjamin's oeuvre and beyond, have been characterised by an archaic and partly theological view of power, understood as something that is either enjoyed in its entirety or lacking altogether - and that once seized has no limits except those that may derive from the encounter with a *law-positing* violence of greater intensity than its own *law-preserving* one[655]. Far from corresponding

[654] We can agree with Giorgio Agamben (*Homo Sacer*, p. 64) on the fact that, at the time of writing *Toward the Critique of Violence*, Benjamin hadn't yet read Carl Schmitt's *Political Theology* – where we find the notion of sovereignty as the power to decide on the state of exception which Benjamin later borrowed in his *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Nonetheless, it emerges quite clearly from the essay on violence that, at the beginning of the 1920s, Benjamin already thought of sovereign power as a "a phenomenon of mass and homogeneous domination" (as we will see in a moment, these are words of Michel Foucault).

[655] Cf. Benjamin, *Toward the Critique of Violence*, pp. 45-46. Even those who have recently tried to follow Benjamin beyond such an impasse have resorted to theological abstractions more than to political analysis. A revealing case is, in this connection, that of the notion of *destituent* (or *de-institutive*) *power*. The term started to gain popularity within Continental political philosophy in the years 2013-2014, when Giorgio Agamben began to use it (especially in the Italian form *potenza destituente*) as if it were a new concept which he was introducing, meaning a relation to power able to escape the dialectic of law-positing and law-preserving violence. He even traced its implicit origins back, in one of his exploits of antiquary erudition, at least to Saint Paul. To the attentive reader, however, destituent power looked just like a more politically-oriented reformulation of the old Agambenian notion of *potency* (see Chapter 3 above) – one that would enable its author to refer in passing to the numerous political uprisings of those years (from the Egyptian and Tunisian revolts to Occupy Wall Street) as a kind of inspiration for his philosophical project. What Agamben never mentioned is that in Latin America the notion of *potencia destituyente* (the Spanish equivalent of his *potenza destituente*) was well-know a decade earlier its purported introduction by him. Indeed, in a popular book published in Spanish in 2002, the scholar-activists of Colectivo Situaciones (Edgardo Fontana, Natalia Fontana, Verónica Gago, Mario Santucho, Sebastián Scolnik and Diego Sztulwarkhad) offered a specific definition of *potencia destituyente* as an innovative praxis emerging from the Argentinian insurrection of November 2001. Not only did Colectivo Situaciones provide an earlier and

to "a phenomenon of mass and homogeneous domination" or to something "that is divided between those who have it and hold it exclusively, and those who do not have it and are subject to it", power is rather, in Foucault's definition, "something that circulates", that "functions only when it is part of a chain", that "is exercised through networks"[656]. A movement like NUdM, which in Argentina acts, sometimes even explicitly, as a form of counter-power against the authority of the state or that of the Catholic Church, is well aware of the implications of such a definition. When, in August 2018, the Argentinian Senate blocked a law proposal aimed at legalizing abortion, Verónica Gago wrote:

This time, the pressures of political power asserted themselves by ensuring that the patriarchal-ecclesiastical pact maintained its power over women's autonomy in decisions regarding motherhood and desires. Undoubtedly, however, the power of the feminist revolution cannot leave us indifferent. Abortion in the streets is already law. Our victory is here, now, and long-lasting. We are making history. They are afraid of us. The contempt shown towards us by the Senate will not remain without consequences. We are angry and euphoric. We do not have hope on our side, but strength[657].

more detailed conceptualisation of destituent power – they also linked it to the practices of a given social movement (with no need to recur to theological ruminations to explain what was in fact part of recent political history). As Sandro Mezzadra and Verónica Gago (a member of both the Colectivo and of NUdM) wrote, "the concept […] forged in that book has widely circulated in Latin America in the following years, to make sense of the political effects of 'insurrections of new type' in several countries" ("In the wake of the plebeian revolt: Social movements, 'progressive' governments, and the politics of autonomy in Latin America", in *Anthropological Theory* 17(4), 2017, p. 493, n.6; see also pp. 483-484). While having many elements in common with one another, those Latin American insurrections were considerably different from the mobilizations Agamben vaguely referred to some years later. This short parable, it seems to me, tells a lot about the provincialism and the disregard for social struggles within much contemporary political philosophy. (Agamben's reflections on destituent power were at first featured in a lecture he gave in France in summer 2013, an English translation of which was then published as Giorgio Agamben, "What is a destituent power?", in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32, 2014, pp. 65-72. A longer version of that text became, in the same year, the epilogue of the last volume of Agamben's *homo sacer* series (Giorgio Agamben, *L'uso dei corpi. Homo sacer iv, 2*, Neri Pozza, Vicenza 2014 pp. 333-351). That volume appeared in English as *The Use of Bodies*, trans. by A. Kotsko, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2016. Colectivo Situaciones published their reflections as *19 y 20. Apuntes para al nuevo protagonismo social*, Ediciones de Mano en Mano, Buenos Aires 2002. An English translation appeared in 2011 (*19 & 20. Notes for a New Social Protagonism*, trans. by N. Holdren and S. Touza, Minor Compositions, New York 2011). The conceptualisation of de-instituting power can be found in chap. 2.

[656] Michel Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended". Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, ed. by Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. by D. Macey, Penguin, New York 2004, p. 29.

[657] Verónica Gago, "Nos tienen miedo", in *Revista Anfibia*, 10/8/2018.

She was well aware of the opposing forces, which included the majority of the Senate and the Catholic Church. The latter, with the support of an Argentinian pontiff, had attempted to deceptively portray the legalization of abortion as a career-women-demand - therefore of no interest to the many poor Argentinian women of Catholic faith[658]. At the same time, Gago knew that power did not lie just on one side, but that much could be found on NUdM's side as well. Abortion was in fact "already law" *in the streets*, in a double way: the feminist movement had, by then, already brought the popular majority to the side of legalisation; even in the absence of legislative initiatives, there were already feminist networks of solidarity that, with the collaboration of doctors and nurses, made safe abortions possible. In light of these elements, the parliamentary defeat represented only a postponement of the victory that NUdM had been working towards for a long time - and which would come two years later with the approval of a law which made medically-assisted abortion accessible and free of charge up to the fourteenth week[659].

This articulate view of power dynamics allows us to understand better the coexistence of anger and joy in NudM's mobilisations: while the former comes from the recognition of one's own vulnerability to structural injustice and from the will to counteract it, the latter emanates from the knowledge that said injustice is a condition common to many - to a multitude that, once well organised, is *both* vulnerable and strong.

A reticular vision of power also makes it possible to overcome the Manichean alternative drawn by Benjamin between a trade unionist and inevitably reformist strike and a general and therefore inherently revolutionary one. The choice between the two extremes is only necessary if the strike is understood as a one-off event, after which either everything or nothing will be achieved. The feminist strike, on the other hand, is not confined to the juncture in which production and reproduction are interrupted, but is structured as an ever-evolving process, based on an extended temporality, which is

[658] Gago, *Feminist International*, pp. 223-225.

[659] Tom Phillips, Amy Booth, Uki Goñi, "Argentina legalises abortion in landmark moment for women's rights", in *The Guardian*, 30/12/2020.

linear rather than punctiform. Entering into a time of strike means spending part of one's daytime organising, conversing, building a shared language, coming together into an assembly. In this way, the need to decide between *reform* and *revolution* vanishes because they can become simultaneous: the presentation of specific demands to the state does not imply that one believes the latter is the best actor to end heteropatriarchal oppression. The immediacy of the reformist demand will thus be complemented by a revolutionary aspiration that emerges for instance from the instruments of direct democracy used by NUdM, which elaborates programmes and tactics in open assemblies attended by up to a thousand people at a time[660].

The rejection of a monolithic reading of power and the processual declination of the strike also make it possible to recognise a complication that Benjamin did not consider and which brings us back to Deleuze and Parnet's warning encountered in Chapter 3: one cannot think about the future of a revolution without at the same time raising the question of the "revolutionary-becoming of people". The feminist strike unfolds over time to bring to maturity a revolutionary subjectivity that is not already given (like the perfectly disciplined working class in Benjamin's text), but which needs to constitute itself - and that will continue to exist even after the strike.

In a sense, the very idea of a revolutionary general strike is reminiscent of the old fallacy of *voluntary servitude*[661]: sovereign power exists only as long as we want to obey it - i.e., as long as we are ready to follow the king's rule or do not decide to organise a strike of all workers against capital. The conception of will behind this reasoning is misleading because it refers to a caricatured individual who always has her wishes clear, never wavers between a yes and a no, nor allows herself to be influenced by volitions other than her own. The feminist strike, on the contrary, is enacted by those who know that structural injustice conditions the will in a thousand different ways, breaks into it, can even alter its reference points: there is nothing unusual in a woman who continues to

[660] Gago, *Feminist International*, pp. 16-17, 36, 170-173.

[661] The obvious reference here is Étienne De La Boétie, *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* [1548], trans. by H. Kurz, Columbia University Press, New York 1942.

feel a sentimental attachment towards a violent partner, or who is unable to call a sexual assault by its name because it was suffered at the hands of a person she trusted. Moreover, saying no, even when one wants to, is not always a viable option, because to do so requires the resources to cope with the consequences of the denial[662].

Servitude never belongs to a completely self-sufficient subjectivity such as the one the Cynics deluded themselves into thinking they could achieve: it is not voluntary, but *passionate*, mediated by a tangle of feelings, needs, relationships[663]. The feminist strike can then become an everyday process also as a special kind of care of the self (and of the other), a gradual coming to terms with the cunning of injustice that one has internalised. Similarly to the use of anger between allies that Lorde and Rich spoke of, such an exercise generates a critical distance from the self that constitutes the condition of what the art duo Claire Fontaine calls, not surprisingly, *human strike*: the adoption of "a behaviour that doesn't correspond to what others tell us about ourselves or to what they expect from us"[664].

"Divine Violence" or Radical Anger?

His account of the revolutionary general strike was not Benjamin's last word on the relationship between law and violence – far from it. Going back to his text will hopefully prove useful to highlight, by way of contrast, NUdM's ways to confront a heteropatriarchal legal system.

Even a revolutionary general strike – the German philosopher claimed – may not be able to go at the root of the seemingly unavoidable connection between violence and law, in the light of which the latter turns out to be a means toward the end represented by the former (violence is needed both to preserve the existing laws and to establish new

[662] López, *Not One Less*, p. 41.

[663] Frédéric Lordon, *Willing Slaves of Capital. Spinoza and Marx on Desire* [2010], trans. by G. Ash, Verso, London 2014, pp. 12-17. On other contemporary misuses of voluntary servitude, see Lorna Finlayson, "On Mountains and Molehills: Problems, Non-problems, and the Ideology of Ideology", in *Constellations* 22(1), 2015, pp. 135-146.

[664] Claire Fontaine, *Human Strike and the Art of Creating Freedom*, Semiotext(e), South Pasadena 2020, p. 121.

ones). In fact, the general strike may find itself entrapped in a "dialectical back-and-forth": today's law-positing violence will become tomorrow's law-preserving one, in a potentially endless loop[665]. It is in such a context that Benjamin introduces the eventuality of *pure violence*, that is of a violence lacking any legal end. According to him, violence would be used as a pure means within a *proletarian general strike* – a strike aimed not at the creation of a new state, but at the abolition of the state once and for all. Together with the state, this new, expressly anarchic type of strike, would abolish also that huge generator of violence that goes under the name of law – outside whose jurisdiction Benjamin thought human relationships would be less violent[666].

Benjamin's reasoning shows here an analogy with Solanas' *SCUM Manifesto*, where the notion of un-work suggested something similar to the proletarian general strike, with the abolition of the state as one of its intended goals. In Solanas, however, political imagination was always mediated by its literary expression – and it would be impossible to understand her *Manifesto* without accounting for the different levels of literality at work there. Benjamin, who at the time of his *Critique* described himself as an anarchist, had in mind a considerably more immediate set of concerns: two years earlier his country had seen the bloody repression of the Spartacus League's revolutionary attempt – in such a context, the issue of the political responsibility coming from the invocation of "pure" violence could not be eluded[667].

It is precisely on the question of responsibility that another aporia emerged. On the one hand, Benjamin believed that the use of violence could be judged only with regards to the legitimacy of the means employed (rather than in the light of its actual consequences). On the other, the proletarian general strike was supposed to recur to violence in a way that was "pure" by definition. As a result, nobody would bear the

[665] Benjamin, *Toward the Critique of Violence*, p. 60. Particularly relevant here is the reading of this passage offered in Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law. The 'Mystical Foundations of Authority'" [1994], in Id., *Acts of Religion*, ed. by Gil Anidyar, Routledge, New York 2002, p. 291.

[666] Benjamin, *Toward the Critique of Violence*, p. 52. Cf. Derrida, "Force of Law", pp. 283-284.

[667] Michael Lowy, "Walter Benjamin et l'anarchisme" [2014], in Id., *La revolution est le frein d'urgence. Essais sur Walter Benjamin*, Éditions de l'éclat, Paris 2019, p. 73.

responsibility for the "possibly catastrophic consequences" of such a strike[668]. Indeed, *guilt* is a legal category – therefore no one could be guilty of a catastrophe which occurred in the very act of destroying the law[669]. Taking responsibility for a catastrophe is something that may be asked of a deity, not a group of revolutionaries. Here lies a possible explanation of why Benjamin thought that class hatred and the related "willingness to sacrifice" (*Opferwille*) needed a horizon of redemption (*Erlösung*)[670]: in order to be bearable, "revolutionary violence" needs the possibility to become "divine". Not by accident, the German philosopher was fascinated by Judaism precisely because the latter implied the acceptance of a responsibility that only the advent of a god, a messianic appearance, would have made tolerable[671].

Still, the enigmatic conclusion of *Toward a Critique of Violence* seems to discard any easy turn to religion and to show that, for Benjamin, deity never took the reassuring shape of a *deus ex machina*. In fact, the final lines of the text inform us that we cannot know "when pure violence was realized in a particular case", whether the divine light had really shone in a proletarian struggle or we had rather got fooled by an optical illusion.[672]. It ultimately is, we can hypothesize, a matter of faith – but this kind of reasoning potentially allows us, as Jacques Derrida rightly noted, to detect divine violence anywhere, in Benjamin's anarchist unionism as well as in Nazi totalitarianism[673]. A god which could be in any place, however, might also be in no place at all.

The temporality of divine violence, like that of theology, is characterized by epochal breaks: before and after the flood, before and after Christ. The legal conception that best suits it is that of divine law, in which all norms are always in force - or, conversely, if

[668] Benjamin, *Toward the Critique of Violence*, p. 53.
[669] Cf. Walter Benjamin, "Fate and Character" [1919], in Id., *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1996, p. 204.
[670] Cf. Walter Benjamin, "Paralipomena zu den Thesen *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*" [1939-1940], in Id., *Gesammelte Schriften I.3*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhauser, Surhkamp, Frankfurt 1991, pp. 1237; 1242-1243.
[671] Benjamin, *Toward the Critique of Violence*, pp. 58-59; Derrida, "Force of Law", pp. 287-291.
[672] Benjamin, *Toward the Critique of Violence*, p. 60.
[673] Derrida, "Force of Law", p. 298.

they are suspended, they seem to be so indefinitely, leading us to doubt their very existence. For a law so conceived, the guilty party and the victim coincide because "all legal guilt" - Benjamin affirmed - "is nothing other than misfortune"[674].

It is on this issue that, between 1919 and 1921, his categories experienced a sort of theoretical short-circuit. Legal concepts started to resemble more and more those of Christianity, which Nietzsche had already defined as the religion of infinite guilt, since nothing would be able to redeem the killing of the son of God[675]. Christianity, for its part, was consumed from the inside by capitalism, "with the result that, in the end, Christianity's history is essentially that of its parasite: capitalism". During the time of the Reformation, Benjamin went on, "Christianity did not promote the emergence of capitalism; rather, it transformed into capitalism". The latter was then redefined as a "cult that does not de-expiate but rather inculpates"[676] – with a virtually perfect circularity, we are here back into law and its terminology. The whole argument was sealed by the German notion of *Schuld*, which – both Nietzsche and Benjamin underlined – in the plural means both *guilt* and *debt*[677]. Trying to fight against this three-headed monster, the idea of the proletarian strike got stalled in Benjamin's own theological subtleties.

By disposing of the metaphysical trappings of the proletarian general strike through a politicization of anger, NUdM and its feminist strike offer a contribution of great theoretical and practical value. A fundamental insight of the movement is that the most radical critique of the existing legal systems - which incorporate and ratify both patriarchy and capitalism, as well as many other structural injustices - lies not so much

[674] Benjamin, "Fate and Character", p. 203.

[675] Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Ecce Homo*, edited by Walter Kaufman, Vintage Books, New York 1989 [1887], p. 92.

[676] Walter Benjamin, "Capitalism as Religion" [1921], in Id., *Toward the Critique of Violence*, pp. 90-92. In this short fragment, Benjamin makes explicit reference to Max Weber's interpretation of the relationship between capitalism and religion. As noted by Michel Löwy ("«Le capitalisme comme religion». Walter Benjamin et Max Weber", in Id., *La revolution est le frein d'urgence*, p. 31), Benjamin's text belongs to what may be called "the anti-capitalist readings of Weber".

[677] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 62-63. For a contemporary take on the debt-guilt nexus see Elettra Stimilli, *Debt and Guilt. A Political Philosophy* [2015], trans. by S. Porcelli, Bloomsbury, London 2019.

in a vague notion of their destruction in a single blow, but in the emptying out of the meaning of their categories, whose life extends far beyond the purview of laws and their enforcement - and which therefore would not disappear even in a hypothetical society liberated from them[678]. Among these categories, a key place belongs to that of *victim*.

In 2017, Micaela Garcia, an Argentinian student and NUdM activist, was murdered by a man on parole from prison, where he was serving a sentence for rape. The case was widely reported in the media and the parliament took it as an occasion to tighten the criminal code, restricting the number of crimes for which probation was allowed. Probation was thus precluded also to those convicted of drug trafficking - the crime for which Argentinian women are most frequently imprisoned, usually for acting as "mules" (i.e., transporting drugs inside their bodies). Micaela's parents and NUdM took a public stand against the reform, declaring "Not in our name"[679]. The Argentinian parliament's behaviour in the wake of Garcia's assassination, however, was hardly exceptional. In fact, for more than a decade and a half, both in Argentina and in Italy, neoliberal and neoconservative political forces have been allied in presenting gender violence as a security problem, to be solved through increased control and repression[680]. An approach of this kind is all but ideologically neutral, and usually comes with a racialized depiction of the violent man (portrayed as an immigrant or a member of an ethnic minority, non-white, with a previous criminal record) which ends up absolving anybody else [681]. A securitarian approach to gender violence is not only politically suspicious, but also dramatically ineffective – since it ignores, in the words of Valessa Bilancetti, sociologist and NUdM acitivist, "the fact that jails are frequently violent places themselves, while repressive policies make some women even more vulnerable to violence, both at home and in the streets". The thought goes here, for example, to

[678] As Deleuze would have it, what is crucial is rather "to have done with God's Judgment", which is always the determining judgement of the law (cf. Gilles Deleuze, "To Have Done with Judgment" [1993], in Id. *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. by D.W. Smith and M.A. Greco, Verso, London 1998, esp. pp. 132-135).

[679] López, *Not One Less*, pp. 13, 29.

[680] Gago, *Feminist International*, p. 79. On Italy, see Federico Zappino (ed.), *Il genere tra neoliberismo e neofondamentalismo*, ombre corte, Verona 2016.

[681] Cf. Anna Simone, *I corpi del reato. Sessualità e sicurezza nella società del rischio*, Mimesis, Milan 2010.

migrant women or to those who are irregular workers, for whom an (always *ex post facto*) official complaint as the only legally available tool against gender violence looks more as mockery than anything else[682].

Within dominant narratives, the victim of sexual violence is presented as a perpetually minor figure, who needs the intervention of an external power to have her rights respected. This implies that the victim is constantly indebted to the authority that is supposed to act in her interest and that can as a consequence expect her to abide by an oppressive code of conduct: the more a woman is forced to prove her correspondence to the patriarchal identikit of the innocent person (to prove that she did not in any way "provoke" the perpetrator(s), that she did not drink, that she was not dressed indecorously), the greater her debt to the saviours on duty - or, to borrow Benjamin's word, her guilt. The victim is guilty because she is not free to protect herself, to take care of herself - affirms the main policy document of NUdM Italy, which adds: "We want autonomy, not assistance"[683].

Dropping the victim's role does not mean pandering to those men who deny the existence of gender-based violence and even depict themselves as victims of feminists' hatred [684], but pointing feminist anger where it is ballistically most effective: in preventing heteropatriarchal violence in its various forms, rather than in repressing it when it has already occurred. Instead of a victimised subjectivity NUdM does not, it should be pointed out, claim that of the "entrepreneur of herself": "The entrepreneur complements the figure of the victim: the two positions of subjectivation proposed by a pink-washing neoliberalism"[685]. The Argentinian activists, who live in a country with

[682] Vanessa Bilancetti, "Il carcere non è la soluzione alla violenza di genere. Il problema è la violenza della società", in *The Vision*, 19/05/2021.

[683] Non Una di Meno, *Abbiamo un piano. Piano femminista contro la violenza maschile sulle donne e la violenza di genere*, November 2017, p. 10, available at: https://nonunadimeno.files.wordpress.com/2017/11/abbiamo_un_piano.pdf .

[684] Caterina Peroni, "Il #MeToo di Hollywood e il #WeTogether di Non Una di Meno. Dalla denuncia alla pratica collettiva contro le molestie sessuali nel/del lavoro", in Marina Bettaglio, Nicoletta Mandolini, Silvia Ross (eds.), *Rappresentare la violenza di genere. Sguardi femministi tra critica, attivismo e scrittura*, Mimesis, Milan-Udine, 2018, pp. 255ff.

[685] Cavallero and Gago, *A Feminist Reading of Debt*, p. 17.

one of the highest levels of private indebtedness in the world, made of the deconstruction of the guilt-debt nexus a key feature of their critique of capitalism.

Within a given household, and especially in contexts of poverty, it is in fact women who are entrusted with the responsibility of paying off family debts, reinforcing the gender stereotypes which frame prudence and caretaking as "naturally" feminine virtues[686]. Indeed, "As moral apparatuses, the family and finance make up a joint machine": debts contracted by the household prevent women from freely managing relationships with violent men, forcing them to remain in abusive relationships or to take on further debts in order to afford the beginning of a new life elsewhere.[687].

Legal and economic victimisation, state paternalism and gender violence come together with religious demonisation in the area of sexual and reproductive health, starting with the access to (ordinary and emergency) contraception and abortion. Not having safe access to abortion exposes women to the risk of being subjected to their partners' reproductive choices and/or to that of having to resort to physically dangerous and economically costly practices such as clandestine abortion[688].

It is, moreover, by virtue of the oppressive definition of motherhood as a family and national duty - that is, as fate (and therefore as guilt, Benjamin would suggest[689]) - that old and new confessional and conservative ideas propose to insinuate their power right into the bodies marked as female. In Italy, where abortion is legal and free of charge but more than 70% of the doctors who can perform it invoke conscientious objection, from a feminist perspective one feels first of all the need not to let the law become a dead letter. Secondly, at the level of social practices (and hence keeping national legislation as it is) there are ways to prevent conscientious objection from becoming a denial of the

[686] Federica Gregoratto, "La vie psychique de la dette et les identités traditionnelles de genre. Perspectives nietzschéennes et kleiniennes", in Jean Francois Bissonette (ed.), *La dette comme rapport social. Liberté ou servitude?*, Éditions Le Bord de L'Eau, Lormont 2017, pp. 72-78.

[687] Cavallero and Gago, *A Feminist Reading of Debt*, pp. 5-7, 22.

[688] On the biopolitical dimensions of abortion, with an emphasis on the Italian context, see Angela Balzano, *Per farla finita con la famiglia. Dall'aborto alle parentele postumane*, Meltemi, Rome 2021, chap. 1.

[689] "Fate shows itself, therefore, in the view of life, as condemned, as having essentially first been condemned and then become guilty" (Benjamin, "Fate and Character", p. 204).

right to reproductive health, for example by expanding the availability of pharmacological abortion, which is used in only one fifth of cases in Italy - compared to 50% in France, Portugal and the United Kingdom.[690]. Going even further (and entering the realm of legislative innovation), one could consider reducing, if the state of scientific knowledge allows so, the level of medicalisation that currently surrounds abortion, favouring the latter partial liberalisation - as hypothesised by Angela Balzano, philosopher and NUdM activist[691].

Such a multiplicity of tactics has been put into work in recent years by the Obiezione Respinta collective (henceforth OR), which was set up in the town of Pisa as a result of the first NUdM activities in Italy. With the help of digital tools, OR has started a process of mapping, protection and self-awareness of women's experiences with conscientious objection (or lack thereof). Thanks to a virtual map, users can point out pharmacies or hospital wards where they have encountered cases of objection, suggest those where instead women's self-determination is fully respected, and more generally share their own experiences in this regard, fighting the stigma and loneliness to which those who use emergency contraceptives or decide to have an abortion are often relegated[692]. The project, as one can easily imagine, has a polemical dimension in which the expression of feminist anger emerges strongly: reporting that in a given hospital women who have abortions are treated as criminals, or that a certain pharmacy refuses to sell an emergency contraceptive even though legally required to do so, are not activities usually welcomed by those who find themselves at the centre of the reporting.

OR's position on legal matters is very pragmatic. When there are already norms protecting women's rights (for example, pharmacists' "conscientious objection" is illegal in Italy), it is a matter of enforcing them - if necessary, with the intervention of

[690] Obiezione Respinta, "Questo corpo sono io. Raccontarci per rompere i tabù, mappare l'obiezione per auto-organizzarci", in Cinzia Settembrini (ed.), *Obiezione respinta! Diritto alla salute e giustizia riproduttiva*, Prospero Editore, Milan 2020, pp. 17-18, 33-34.

[691] Angela Balzano, "Corpi compromessi: i nostri aborti tra sanzioni e obiezioni", in Settembrini (ed.), *Obiezione respinta!*, pp. 156-158.

[692] See https://obiezionerespinta.info/.

the competent authorities. When the existing laws contain elements not easily compatible with one another (e.g. women's right to abortion and doctors' right to conscientious objection), an attempt can be made to resolve the conflict at a pre-legislative level, as happened with the *SOS Aborto!* ("SOS Abortion!") campaign, launched in 2020 during the first lockdown due to Covid-19. The campaign called for widening the access to pharmacological abortion at a time when hospitals were under great pressure. A few months later, the Italian Ministry of Health issued new guidelines, accepting all the requests coming from OR and allied associations, which now continue to oversee their effective ratification and application by individual regions[693]. In still different situations, as with the proposal to de-hospitalise abortion mentioned by NUdM's Serena Fredda[694], it may be necessary to intervene directly by promoting changes to the existing body of law.

Collectives like OR participate in the emergence of what Caterina Peroni, sociologist of law and NUdM activist, calls *feminist citizenship*. To be a citizen in the fullness of one's rights is a way to avoid victimisation and to reclaim a political subjectivity - but there's more to feminist citizenship than just an extension of classical (liberal and republican) portraits of the (male) citizen. In NUdM's activities, Peroni claims, feminist citizenship also implies the creation of "new forms of normativity", exemplified most of all by the Italian chapter's *Piano femminista contro la violenza* ("Feminist plan against gender violence"), a detailed document published at the end of 2017, the product of the coordinated efforts of 9 different working groups over the course of a year[695].

The "Plan" played first a role in criticising the emergency and securitarian approach of the Extraordinary Anti-Violence Plan proposed by the government then in charge in Italy. At the same time, it developed in great detail new guidelines to counter the emergence of gender-based violence in areas ranging from the media to public

[693] Obiezioni Respinta, "Questo corpo non sono io", pp. 35-39.

[694] Cf. Serena Fredda, "Diritto alla salute e all'autodeterminazione nel movimento Non Una di Meno", in Settembrini (ed.), *Obiezione respinta!*, pp. 136-137.

[695] Non Una di Meno, *Abbiamo un piano*.

education, from income-support measures to the conditions of immigrant women. It also surveyed practices of solidarity and mutualism successfully experimented by the movement, such as the *consultorie transfemministe* ("trans-feminist counselling centres") - not mere health centres, but "places of self-organisation and self-appropriation starting from the knowledge of one's own body". This bottom-up welfare model was not presented in opposition to normal public services, which NUdM defends against the neoliberal push for privatisation, but as a radical enhancement of them[696].

From a theoretical perspective, the normative innovations charted by Peroni show the importance of recurring to *uses* (the habitual and customary practices which we encountered in the previous chapter) and to their sedimentations (socially shared *rules*) in opposition to *both* state laws (which may be absent, insufficient or even functional to gender violence) *and* to those reactionary categories, such as the debt-guilt couple, whose influence extends well beyond the state's activities[697]. For instance, when the existing legal norms do not provide sufficient assistance to a woman willing to denounce her partner, NUdM can activate its own protocols of support, which go from finding sheltering spaces to providing free legal assistance. Similarly, if a NUdM activist is abused by a man, that person becomes "not-welcome" to the many organizations, groups and social spaces with whom NUdM collaborates. When possible, processes of restorative gender justice are then offered to those men who are willing to no longer act in a violent way[698]. All these practices work on a different level than state laws, which they may openly challenge, complement or indirectly push to change (think here of Gago's "abortion in the streets is already law"). They show that beyond law-preserving, law-positing and even divine violence there is no dichotomic alternative between the heteropatriarchal state and sheer chaos – rather, there is the praxis of using one's life to build common customs and rules while taking care of oneself and of one another.

[696] Caterina Peroni, "Pratiche femministe di cittadinanza", in *Leggendaria* 131, 2018, pp. 37-42.

[697] Here, as in Chapter 6, I am developing Paolo Virno's analysis in "L'uso della vita", p. 126.

[698] On how the (complex) process of restorative gender justice can work in practice, see the wonderful piece by Giusi Palomba, "Femminismo anticarcerario. Amicizia, stupro, comunità", in *Menelique* 3, 2020, available at: https://www.menelique.com/femminismo-anticarcerario-amicizia-stupro-comunita/.

Even though NUdM's activists do not often call themselves abolitionists, what we have here is close to the abolitionist feminism that we saw in Chapter 4, for which the *absence* of structurally unjust social arrangements makes room for the *presence* of just institutions, and utopian long-term strategies go hand in hand with pragmatic everyday tactics. Nothing in NUdM's pragmatism, however, should be confused with moderation in the face of the status quo. Differently from state laws, uses and rules cannot be constrained in the straightjacket of determining judgement: their radicality resides precisely in their constant openness to change and in their need to be continuously re-enacted in order to keep their effectiveness. While laws need to be expressly abrogated for them not to be applied anymore, rules rely on the constant agreement of those who follow them – their fragility is therefore also the ground of their collective legitimacy. Similarly, uses always admit the appearance of disruptive cases, of new occurrences which the "users" had not previously taken into account. Fighting heteropatriarchal injustice often implies operating at the level of state legality, but in the end gender justice cannot be achieved without its implementation at the level of shared rules and uses – a goal that needs much more than passing new laws and trying to punish those who do not respect them. This is the reason why the normative innovations of NUdM are not focused only on minimizing the harm produced by instances of violence after they have occurred, but also in preventing violence from taking place. Spreading a radically trans-feminist culture is part and parcel of such a process and anger can easily become the spark to ignite much needed public conversations, as well as to remind anybody that feminism is a force operative the world.

Leaving the Stage to Politics

The last chapter of a dissertation is supposed to be the one where everything gets sorted out, results are presented, expectations are finally met. This could be, in a sense, also the story of this chapter. In NUdM's practices many of the concepts elaborated in the

present study find a powerful exemplification, while the movement's achievements stand as proof of the political potential that lies in the uses of anger against structural forms of injustice.

This is not, however, the story as I would like it to be told. Politics is not a bunch of facts to which academics can point to claim that they have been right all along. If there is a thing that this chapter shows above all, it is how practically rich and theoretically insightful the trajectory of a social movement can be. People do not need philosophers telling them how to get angry – in fact, anger is not something that one can feel just because someone advised her to do so. Even when they do get angry, what they want to accomplish goes much beyond any theoretical schematisation. You do not offer a political philosophy of anger to make sense of the feminist strike – it makes perfect sense in itself. It is rather something like the feminist strike that you have to take into account if you want to write something minimally interesting about radical anger.

I have been interested in the political implications of this feeling for a long time. If I had to say when that interest first appeared in a serious enough way, I would pick a time between the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017. In the summer of that year I authored an essay in which, inspired by Audre Lorde, I first wrote of a *ballistics of anger*[699]. I had discovered Lorde in the first piece I remember reading on the political uses of anger – it was written by Carlotta Cossutta, a philosopher and NUdM activist, and it was a call for NUdM's 2016 feminist strike, the first to take place in Italy[700]. Feminist anger was already there, as politics always is (we are born into a world that was political before we even existed), and it literally found me. If this chapter concludes my *discourse* on anger, acknowledging the roots of this whole dissertation is part of the *life-choice* that comes with it.

[699] Franco Palazzi, "Vite di scarto. Per una genealogia critica del rogo di Grenfell Tower", in *Effimera*, 17/7/2017.

[700] Carlotta Cossutta, "Per una manifestazione di rabbia erotica", in *Effimera*, 21/11/2016.

Conclusions

In this dissertation, I have chosen to analyse the relationship between anger and politics going beyond the manifestations of anger that resonate the most in the public sphere – those which resort to anger to defend and deepen socially structural forms of injustice and that we may call "reactionary". My choice was dictated by a sense of opportunity (focusing only on the worst uses of anger risks making us ignore its politically radical potential), but also by the belief that today's reactionary anger is influential because it has been allowed to dictate the political agenda – and, as a consequence, to attract a great deal of academic attention. Conversely, expressions of anger that go in an egalitarian direction by contrasting one or more forms of structural injustice (what I have called *radical anger*), are alternatively stigmatised or ignored. I briefly investigated this paradox in the Introduction, which also provided a number of methodological clarifications essential for writing about the politics of feelings today.

Chapter 1 delved into a possible genealogy of rage, by relating its association with a disease (rabies) to its status as a feeling and showing how, behind the persistent intertwining of anger-as-a-pathology and anger-as-a-feeling, lies the contempt for the political role of the masses, especially when composed of people who denounce structural injustice.

Chapter 2 offered a first glimpse of hope: while it is true that the anger voiced by oppressed social groups is often pathologised and repressed, there is also no shortage of examples, within what Walter Benjamin called *the tradition of the oppressed*, of politically empowering uses of anger. From such an empirical heterogeneity, the need to clarify the relationship between radical anger and political violence emerged. I argued that radical anger is not necessarily violent, but that at the same time it can resort to violent means – a fact that makes the range of possible political uses of anger even wider and more complex. In order to orient ourselves in this scenario, the metaphor of the *ballistics of anger* was introduced as a tool for making an initial assessment of anger's

different uses – taking into account first and foremost its effectiveness in terms of contrasting or reinforcing structural injustices, but also recognizing the appropriateness of some expressions of anger despite their lack of effectiveness.

Chapter 3 offered the outline of a *political philosophy of radical anger*. Working within a conception of philosophy as both discourse and life-choice, the chapter looks for the *form(s) of life* that may correspond to a radical use of anger. In this connection, I took as a starting point the reinterpretation of Ancient Cynicism made by the late Michel Foucault. In the light of Foucault's reflections on the relationship between subjectivity and truth, I then asked whether radical anger can be said to be "truer" than reactionary anger. Three possible arguments in favour of an affirmative answer were considered. Since the first two, based respectively on the works of Rahel Jaeggi and Giorgio Agamben, proved unsuccessful, I proposed a third alternative, drawing from the thought of Foucault and Hannah Arendt.

The next three chapters were devoted to as many figures of the recent past who, through their lives and works, provided original, albeit implicit, reinterpretations of the Cynical model. Chapter 4 dealt with Valerie Solanas' uncompromising feminism, drawing from her *SCUM Manifesto* several lessons on the relationship between anger and the concepts (and practices) of negation, utopia and abolition. It was then the turn of Malcolm X, presented in Chapter 5 as a living radicalization of the Foucauldian notion of *care of the self* in its interactions with radical anger. Chapter 6 took me to Audre Lorde and her recourse to anger against both enemies and allies, which I interpreted in the light of her conception of *the erotic* and of the related notion of *use*.

In Chapter 7 I looked for contemporary instances of radical anger, finding a particularly rich example in the practical and theoretical activities of the international trans-feminist movement Ni Una Menos - Non Una di Meno, on whose Argentinian and Italian chapters I focused. This chapter provided a concrete demonstration of how radical anger can be politically productive.