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Theses on Covid-1984

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Summer 2022

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etc. The idea that organs are replaceable pieces goes together with Fordism as well as the birth of transplant science. What would the body become in a digital society if not a flux of information? Nevertheless, the Fordist paradigm doesn't disappear within the data paradigm, it radicalises. Now tissues, liquids, molecules, genes and cells are removable, replaceable and recombinable. And since all of reality is a flux of information, the living cannot only be recombined (biotechnologies), but also connected (digital therapies) thanks to bridges (nanotechnologies). The aim is obvious: "universal monitoring for health care assistance to the community" (already pursued in 2004 through techno-medical sensors by the Ubi-Mon project of the Imperial College London). Bodies-machines in a society-machine. Or if one prefers more organic metaphors: chickens that have to be regularly vaccinated to survive and produce in a livestock-world.

Here's the most anti-programmatic of programmes: *to release our grip* rather than realising the umpteenth Big Work (political, economical, technological, medical). To release our grip on ourselves, on our fellow human beings, animals, plants, the Earth.

To sabotage the objectives of power so as to not buckle under its means.

To destroy the destruction of humans by stopping its avant-garde and by unmasking its servants.

Planet Earth,
beginning of June 2021

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roughly equivalent to the situation of the prisoner in Auschwitz: either act in accord with the prevailing standards of conduct enforced by those in authority, or risk whatever consequences they may wish to impose.” (George M. Kren & Leon Rappoport, *The Holocaust and the Crisis of Human Behavior*)

xvi. To let go

“Medicine constitutes one of the most obvious moments of attack on the human body. Capitalism becomes explicit through its doctors and scientists, an army in the front line of the war, effective final resolution, that capital leads against living beings.

A disease, this one, terminal.

Once again, and we will never tire of whispering and screaming it, we are faced with an ultimatum: with humans or with capital.

With humans or with medicine.”

That’s what 30 years ago Simone Peruzzi and my friend Riccardo d’Este wrote in *Medicina maledetta ed assassina*.

War medicine isn’t only a wartime metaphor with which social militarisation and the appointment of a NATO general as *Commisario straordinario per l’emergenza* (Special Commissioner for the Emergency) was justified, but it’s indeed the description of reality.

The metaphors that are used to represent bodies and diseases were always an important social indicator. If they don’t say much about what concretely happens to living bodies, they inform us rather well on the changes in modes of production and in scientific paradigms. Within certain constants, the dominant representations are updated and become layered. The virus-disease as enemy, the body as a besieged fortress, the immunity system as police organ of control and repression; cosmology that separates human beings from nature, men from women, adults from children, bodies from minds. The ascent of industrial capitalism is marked by the vision of the body as a machine and its organs as valves, pistons, pumps,

collected documentation, but also on the fact that Mengele¹⁷ and the *Aktion T4* programme¹⁸ were scientific-state examples still fresh in collective memory. The attack and sabotage of a genetic engineering that advanced at that time under the banner of democratic welfare and the health of people was a concrete resistance against the new horrors that were being prepared. It was also an ethical position against *orders that have to be followed*, in other words, a rupture with grandparents and parents who collaborated or had allowed it to pass in silence. The message of these explosive and incendiary devices was: *Never again*.

Why does nowadays the information that the heads of big digital multinationals are declared and active transhumanists, seems to us little more than a byword of the word profit? Why does the news that the chief developer of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine is a known eugenicist and advocate of the sterilisation of women in Africa, seems questionable or exaggerated? Without a doubt because we have become more passive and distrustful given the flood of information that circulates online. But, above all, because of the relative comfort in which we have been raised, impervious to any historical consciousness.

Here are the extreme words of two not particularly extremist historians in 1980, less numbed because of their direct experience: “Within certain limits set by political and military power considerations, the modern state may do anything it wishes to those under its control. There is no moral-ethical limit which the state cannot transcend if it wishes to do so, because there is no moral-ethical power higher than the state. [...] in matters of ethics and morality, the situation of the individual in the modern state is in principle

¹⁷ Mengele was a medical doctor and SS officer, while working in concentration camps he was in charge of selecting people to send to the gas chambers and he conducted brutal experiments on prisoners (focused on genetic research).

¹⁸ *Aktion T4* was a forced euthanasia programme in Nazi Germany and occupied territories of those considered to have a mental or physical “defect”. The selection process was overseen by medical doctors.

“When something is presented as progress, I ask myself first of all if it makes us more or less human.” - George Orwell

“The most inhumane actions today are actions without humans.”
- Günther Anders

i. Truths hidden on the surface

“How could they have not noticed and accepted all this?” That’s what readers of history books and moviegoers will ask themselves when, in some decades, the many lies that were spread during the Covid-19 epidemic, which justified the projects of domination to supposedly fight it, will be recounted. These posthumous observers will comfortably be *on the side of virtue*, as we are when reading a book about the fight against nazism or when we watch a movie about the antislavery rebellion.

Seventy years after the events of the so-called “Spanish” flu, something was published resembling an in-depth and reliable reconstruction of the spread and impact it had. We could argue that the reasons for such a delay are connected to the peculiarities of a pandemic that concluded even more tragically than immense massacre that was the First World War. However, they also reside in the burden that the steel net of military censorship had on contemporaries and subsequent generations (the very term *Spanish*, as is well known, derives from the fact that only the press in neutral Spain could speak freely about it). But are we sure that the quagmire of current sources – along with the preventive and ferocious discrediting that has struck and still strikes every non-aligned analysis – will itself not be considered a silicon cage by future historians? After only one year of Covid, the amount of scientific articles published in online magazines is so overwhelming that Artificial Intelligence is being used to analyse them. What can these historians be sufficiently *certain* of?

It is likely that the best among them will be divided and will argue – as has already been the case for much greater historical events, such as the colonisation of the Americas or nazism – from two approaches: a *functionalist* approach and an *intentionalist* one. This will then be followed by other historians who will seek a synthesis between the two positions. The functionalist approach favours the analysis of social dynamics. The intentionalist one assigns more importance to the stated values and programmes of the elites. Was the extermination of the native population of the Americas a deliberate project or was it the outcome of a combination of causes (among others: the spread of lethal diseases by the conquistadors played at least as much of a role as the catholic doctrine's portrayal of natives as soulless peoples)? Was the destruction of the jews the result of the total mobilisation of bureaucratic and industrial forces and structures or was it the fulfilment of the party's programme (present since the beginning)?

As is well known, even when consulting the same (never exhaustive) historical sources, interpretations can wildly diverge. Because they can never be separated from the heuristic, ethical and political subjectivity of the historian. For example, liberal historians, who see nazism as a monstrous parenthesis in the progress of the 20th century, will be inclined to explain the gas chambers as antisemitic madness, rather than a *solution* produced by a technical and bureaucratic apparatus within the *steel storms* of a particularly cruel war between empires. Otherwise, the defendants at its own Nuremberg trials wouldn't only be the nazi leaders, but also industrial executives and not few scientific experts (and the responsibility for the extermination factories would cross the ocean and reach the heart of the giant IBM...). Conversely, these liberal historians will tend to fade anything that gives the British colonisation of North-America the *intentionality* of extermination. Can an admirer of American democracy support (as a historian) its genocidal origins?

oretical knowledge alone cannot surpass. From observing the actions of the state throughout history or in the contemporary scenarios of war and neocolonial domination, we know that there's no ethical, political or legal limit to its power politics (nowadays technocratic). Nevertheless some conclusions seem *exaggerated* to us. Is it possible that so many economical interests were sacrificed in the short term to prepare the conditions for a *Great Transition*? Is it possible that so many people were left to die to impose the public conviction that Covid-19 was incurable, thus conditioning "reopenings", the "restart" and the "return to normality" on a general biotechnological vaccination? Didn't the social engineering and extermination practices that states carried out during the 20th century (on average 30.000 people murdered each day) already confirm: "Yes, it is possible"? In the meantime the means at their disposal only multiplied and radicalised.

In the '80s a group like *Rote Zora* (expression of a broader revolutionary and radical feminist movement) attacked, among other targets, scientific centres and genetic engineering laboratories. Because they saw in these researchers and in these institutions the continuation of Nazi eugenics. A continuity that wasn't only biographical (among the directors were important figures of the national-socialist scientific programmes) but also projectual. Nevertheless, antifascism was a blunt weapon to grasp the continuity of projects. Attention had to be given to the geographical dynamics of domination, in addition to the historical ones. This was the only way to grasp the connection between biotechnologies applied to agriculture and genetic engineering applied to human beings, between forced sterilisation programmes for poor women in Porto Rico, Brazil or Africa and access to assisted reproductive technology for women in advanced capitalism countries, between bomb imperialism and vaccine imperialism. The conviction that these inhumane projects were very real, depended not only on

(arming of the proletariat, insurrection, connection between the revolutionary movements of different countries, etc.). Let's neglect to imagine which measures these revolutionaries would have taken if they would have been in power during the epidemic... and let's go straight to the heart of the matter. Those who want power, want the means of power. The technological machine (concentration of knowledge, hierarchical and functional division of roles, efficacy as value in itself, competition in the search of the most efficient solutions, etc.) develops because it heightens the coercive power of those who govern society. This power – as the history of the 20th century richly illustrates – exploits humans insofar as it pillages nature, and vice versa. It is of little use to call oneself anti-colonialist and to take over indigenous slogans because they are in fashion, if one doesn't mentally deconstruct the history of colonialism. Indigenous communities that live in a balanced relationship with their surroundings have been and are communities without state.

The fairy tale of a temporary and transitory use of political power never materialized. Similarly, a revolution that doesn't destroy *in its course* the causes of the environmental disaster would entrust to the state the means to stop the revolutionary momentum as well as the levers of a pillaging machine necessary to secure a new social division between rulers and executors. The outcome: a technocracy with a coat of green paint.

The destruction of the state is the ecological measure that makes all others possible.

xv. In principle

The theoretical shortcomings in understanding the ongoing historical transformation (in which the acceleration called emergency takes place) probably depend as much on obsolete interpretative frameworks as on a leftover of beliefs that the-

The revolutionary critique has adopted the functionalist explanations of historical phenomena. This is not only because the materialist analysis always contains multiple factors (heuristic reason), but also because intentionalist interpretations end up more or less voluntarily exonerating the social system, making horror the exception and not the rule, transforming certain forms of oppression from structural dynamics into political pathologies (ethical-political reason).

Nevertheless, between anarchists and Marxists, and within these two currents of the proletarian movement itself, there has always been a conflict over what's truly structural and what, in a certain way, derives from it (and what degree of autonomy the derivative elements have). Schematically speaking, according to anarchists power doesn't coincide with profit and it is control that produces privileges rather than the opposite. There are historical moments when the will of power and its political intentions overtake the dynamic of capitalist accumulation. Nazism is an obvious example. The final solution was pursued even when its logistics drained more resources from the German war machine. Why? To trace a direct line between the pages of *Mein Kampf* and the gas chambers? No, because it was the functional outcome of the totality of the techno-bureaucratic machine, which had turned antisemitism into its *fuel*. If, on the contrary, we would limit ourselves to observing the "impersonal forces of capital" (deprived of an autonomous political intention), the destruction of an exploitable workforce would be a non-functional waste, thus hard to explain.

The revolutionary critique of conspiracy theories is also connected to functionalism and intentionalism. For a long time, the concept of conspiracy theory (or the *police version of history*) described any explanation that – disregarding the dynamics of socio-political conflicts – attributed the causes of historical events to the more or less hidden plans of an elite, or to the schemes of occult lobbies, the police or secret services. Among the best known exam-

ples we find the fascist thesis of judaeo-masonic lodges that rule the world, or the Stalinist one according to which the armed struggle groups in Italy were manoeuvred by corrupt state institutions. In all these cases the conspiracy theories were a weapon *against* the movements. In fact, no statesman or journalist has ever defined as a conspiracy theorist those who claim that the Red Brigades were manipulated. This is because the *unacceptable* scandal lies precisely in the existence of an uncontrollable class conflict, within which the autonomous action of combative political groups took place. Any *behind-the-scenes* explanation that could dismiss this “public secret” was functional for the state. This went as far as hinting at the involvement of parts of the state apparatus in the Aldo Moro kidnapping... Better a daring *spy story* than the raw and simple truth that a group of workers organised and went after the leader of the party in power. The obsessive repetition of the former can nourish a flourishing publishing market and for many years produce comatose-depressive social effects, while the mere mention of the latter is enough to unsettle many *arcana imperii* and, above all, risks sowing the seeds of certain bad thoughts.

But the revolutionary critique of conspiracy theories has more profound and less contingent reasons. The first being that *what appears is more than enough* to despise this world and to seek to overthrow it.

“Conspiracy theory” has long been a term used mainly by radical movements to distinguish between a real critique and its reactionary parody, while also reducing the police to their sad and subordinate function, rather than making them lead roles. There’s an abyss between the historical memory of struggles and the documents of the police stations! To so-called normal people, this adjective-noun meant little or nothing.

Thousands of proletarians and the poor are rebelling against a world in which there’s no room for them. Others – more privileged and with (up to now) modest demands – no longer claim their assigned place in the world. Ironically, a part of revolutionary theory (perfectly prepared for disasters) has acted as a *tranquillizer* (the structural causes of the epidemic, the crisis of capital... all anticipated) instead of as a detonator of a besieged and belittled life.

The technocrats are right on one point: we don’t restart from zero tomorrow.

xiv. Ecological measures

Let’s pick up in our own way the lucky intuition of Chesterton. An inventory of efficient solutions is useless when “things go very wrong.” We need to change the very definition of problems. We need a utopia.

Faced with the emergency, groups and movements began to express their *programmes* – previously left in the background of the intermediary struggles. And here emerged the decisive question: the question of the state.

Given that capitalism will never change its overtly ecocidal course, what’s to be done?

Use state power to stop the plunder that the “ecological” energy transition only worsens. That’s where the Stalinists, degrowth advocates and Leninists converge when the circumstances oblige them *to speak clearly*. The less radical delude themselves in thinking that it’s possible to instil from below a “common good” direction to state planning (here the tendencies are divided: should the development be stopped or nationalised?). The more coherent ones aim for an “ecological Leninism.” State power can only interrupt private profit and impose truly ecological plans when the state is totally stripped of its capitalist nature. Let’s put aside that small detail of the revolutionary conquest of political power

are more sensitive to the appeals of responsibility from institutions and the hammering argument to “do it for the frail.” But also because of the internalised idea that the state expresses the general interest. Or, at least, that it’s the only power – even if it is weakened and hindered by the economical interests of some – capable of imposing it. Fear (of getting sick or of getting fined) can only partially explain what happened. So much so that milieus used to struggles and repression weren’t spared differences and conflicts. The rift opened during the first lockdown has widened, along much the same lines, when faced with the question of vaccination. For some the lines of rupture were already drawn. Many families (largely from middle-class background, careful about their children’s nutrition, aware of alternative medicine, environmentalists, adherents of non-violent models, etc.) simply asked the state to not interfere in matters of education and care. The “Lorenzin law” in 2017 – which introduced mandatory vaccinations on behalf of Glaxo – was for them a kind of crash course in state doctrine. Either they capitulated faced with the logic of *fait accompli* (i.e. force) or they dedicated themselves to alternative schools, building links at the margins of their now integrated contemporaries. The Covid-19 crisis deepened these fractures. The refusal of online classes provided another opportunity for protest and for the creation of micro-communities. The paradox is that these people (rather well-informed about vaccines, GMOs, lack of home care, and the health impacts of the 5G network) find the radical milieus too aligned with dominant medicine. And they think that those who didn’t take sides against lockdowns and against mandatory vaccination are subservient to “sanitary fascism.” The experience of the last year and a half has served as a *dividing line*, precisely because the government measures have taken advantage of an “apocalyptical imagination that has lingered in the social subconscious for decades” (the feeling that *something is about to happen* is the way bodies react to the ongoing environmental disaster).

ii. “Addà venì Garibaldi”

Over the course of history, the poor and exploited have sought to explain the world to themselves (and to give themselves courage) with the tools they had at their disposal. Folklore has always been one of these. Beliefs, songs, rituals, proverbs, legends and stories were the spontaneous forms of a culture from below, oral, uneducated, long unschooled. This folklore blended many elements of truth (as self-understanding of one’s own experience) in a fatalistic and reflective framework (at once the expression of the subordination to the representations of the dominant class and the outlet of a captive life).

Gramsci¹ – for whom, to be clear, I nourish very little political sympathies – said with keen intuition that proletarian culture shouldn’t have a haughty and scholarly attitude towards popular folklore, rather attempt to gather the elements of truth, liberating them from fatalist representations. Togliattism was a parody of this attitude. It replaced folkloric myths with political myths, in this case myths being what transmit passivity and hope at the same time. Why did Togliatti², following Moscow’s instructions, impose the name “Garibaldi” on the members of partisan groups? Not only to underline the patriotic nature of the Resistance (as a “Second Risorgimento”) but also to *technicize* – as Károly Kerényi said – a redeeming myth from popular folklore (“Addà venì Garibaldi!”).³

¹ Gramsci was a founding member and leader of the PCI, he is nowadays best known for his theories on cultural hegemony.

² Togliatti was the leader of the PCI from 1927 until 1964.

³ This idea of a return or resurrection of a past popular figure – saint or ruler – to act as a saviour of the common people has a long tradition grounded in Christianity and transposed into popular and unorthodox myths, heretic prophesies and millenarian rebellions. After World War II the Stalinists in Italy tried to recuperate these myths by calling on Garibaldi – a republican nationalist and main figure in the Italian unification or Risorgimento (mid-19th century) – and *Baffone* – “the moustache” aka Stalin. According to Kerényi this would be a technicized

In popular folklore we find both the idea of a world made unjust and unmoveable by a kind of spell, and the idea of a magical and painful formula capable of redeeming at a stroke, erasing debts – and inequalities (the Jubilee⁴). If there is anything that doesn't belong to folklore and that has been injected from the outside – it's the belief in a liberation *step by step*, following a cumulative temporality and the ascending dynamics of a historical law.

iii. Services

An unprecedented element in the management of the Covid-19 epidemic is the media use of the term “conspiracy theory” – referring to any thesis that questions official truths. Such a hammering (and international) use is not accidental, corresponding both with *functional* and *intentional* reasons. It suffices to quote the report of the Italian secret services for the year 2020 to give an example of this *inverted* use of a concept that in the past was above all used by revolutionaries. In it this concept is used to define the views of the far-right as well as those from the radical circles. When a secret agent calls others “conspiracy theorists” it cannot be brushed off as a simple coincidence, nor can it be seen as an unfunny joke. It deserves an explanation. Just as deserving of an explanation is the fact that the ideas and actions against the 5G towers and positions against mass vaccination were the ones branded as conspiracy theories. At the beginning (and then less and less) we could hear about the relationship between deforestation, industrial breeding and the transmission of viruses between species, even on the radio. In-depth reports conducted by ever-present experts seemed to fictitiously support a general anti-capitalist analysis to disarm

myth as opposed to a genuine myth because it's consciously instrumentalised as a propaganda tool and has no spontaneity and fluidity.

⁴ The Jubilee is part of Jewish and Catholic tradition as a special year during which a kind of universal pardon is granted.

are seen as pawns of technocracy, while they are both its historical incubators and its political and military organizers.

Those who run the Internet of Things, govern humans. Those who govern humans, run the Internet of Things.

xiii. A small novelty

A separate chapter – which we can only briefly touch on – is the revolutionary theory in times of emergency. Those who possessed a radical “ethical-political” interpretative framework, effortlessly incorporated this small novelty that was the social incarceration of billions of people. At its heart, the SARS-CoV-2 epidemic only worsened the crisis of the capitalist mode of production and its anti-ecological relation with nature. Technocratic management is only a by-product of the capitalist war against workers and the ecosystem... But this experience was a shock (and not only because of worries linked to economical survival) for a big part of “common people,” who have no preexisting theoretical filters. Not everyone internalised the measures imposed by “dire necessity” without resistance. For thousands of people, that the state prevented them from going outside and from seeing their friends and loved ones, that it imposed a bureaucratic justification for daily activities, or that it prescribed through emergency decrees how many people they could eat lunch with and which houses they could enter, was a proof of “fascism”, of a sanitary “health dictatorship”. To which extent these people are exposed to the political-media propaganda or are orientated to online “counter-narratives”, changes the kind of categories they use. That seems quite clear. Just as it is clear that the way one reacts to an unprecedented situation depends on several factors: class position, access to cultural instruments, previous protest experiences, personal network, etc. It seems to be mainly middle-class and left people who adapted with the most conviction to the governmental measures. Probably because they

wants to make our bodies the new colonies for the digital and pharmaceutical industries.

Yet, it's enough to mention Bill Gates and the left militant – including some comrades – will frown, so long as a brilliant theorist with their endless sarcasm about Satan's plans doesn't come along... If this isn't communication warfare!

While the openly professed neo-Malthusian engagement of Microsoft's former chairman is undeniable (coincidentally the excess people on this planet are those of colour, just as the women to be sterilized...). His funding of all the companies involved in the development of the new generation of vaccines is undeniable. His ID2020 programme aiming at attributing to every human being a digital identity through so-called quantum tattoos¹⁶, is undeniable. His plan to transform bodily activity in patentable property is undeniable. His "prophecies" – which are actually *work-in-progress* – that bear a striking resemblance to the anti-Covid measures taken by NATO member states, are also undeniable.

These are truths – in the Orwellian sense ($2+2=4$) – whatever the Western and Eastern technocrats say on the matter.

When do partial truths become total lies? When we separate the intentions of *certain* centres of power from the functionality – for *all* powers – of a big technological leap forward. When states

¹⁶ ID2020 is a public-private partnership set up by companies (including Microsoft) and GAVI (Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization – another public-private consortium, also funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation) that works for the UN towards the goal of a digital identity for everyone that's always accessible, unique and stays with you during your whole life. What that would look like in practice stays vague at the moment but storage of personal biometric data on a blockchain and microchip implants seem to be all on the table. Researchers at MIT looked into quantum dots as a way to identify those who have been vaccinated. The micro-particles with quantum dot dye (that would be injected at the same time as the vaccine) can be detected through the skin with a smartphone camera that has its infrared filter disabled. The research was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Both projects started before the Covid-19 epidemic.

it in its immediate action. Any listener who would call in raising the slightest doubts about vaccinations or mentioning a burned cell tower roused uneasy reactions and the catch-all label: conspiracy theory. Let us attempt to formulate a hypothesis about this parody (the conspiracy theorist, historically the enemy of the revolutionary movement, suddenly becomes an enemy of the state). Probably the governments expected that it would mainly be revolutionaries and radicals who would fundamentally put into question the aim and function of their "anti-Covid" measures. In a mixture of intentionality and tested functionality, it was enough to present the "conspiracy theorist" as an enemy of collective health and the government as its guarantor (however clumsy, incompetent or subordinated to the interests of Confindustria⁵). This is how it was possible to align certain words of the state and certain words of radicals (especially those concerned about compromising their public image). In the background, as we will see, an unresolved knot of many movements of the 20th century coagulated in all its materiality: the question of the state.

Anyway, what happened to the belief that what they tell us on TV *is all a lie*? In popular folklore, in the forms it takes in digital society. Has "critical culture" (according to Gramsci's theory) illuminated the elements of truth, to try to dismantle the reactionary and fatalist ones? No. To keep away from "conspiracy theories", "fake news", "negationism", it deliberately ignored its reasons – confused, partial, naive, highly polluted, but also understandable and meaningful – into a downward spiral: if I didn't say anything about the lockdowns yesterday, what could I say about the curfew today? If I didn't say anything about denied home care, what to say today about vaccines? So, as the fog thickened and the cage strengthened, everyone traveled down the paths they felt the safest on: the struggle against repression for some, logistically supporting workers' struggles for others, fighting against environmental devasta-

⁵ Confindustria is the lobby of bosses in Italy.

tion for still others. Fair and necessary battles, sure, but somehow *aside from* the terrain on which the state and the technocrats had placed their artillery.

iv. Toxic gases

The dominant tendencies in the proletarian movement of the 20th century (which have not totally disappeared after the reflux of the struggles of the '70s and the fall of the Soviet Union, but have taken rudimentary and *volatile* forms) saw in the state either a neutral political organisation or the mere business committee of the bourgeoisie. In the first case, the entry of workers' parties into the institutions and the improvement of workers' conditions obtained by syndicalist force would have progressively broadened democratic spaces until arriving to socialism. In the second case, only the violent conquest of political power would have permitted an anticapitalist use of the state (first step towards its abolition). Stalinism made the first vision a tactic and the second a strategy (or, more exactly, an enchanting promise that justifies an alliance with the more "progressive" sectors of the bourgeoisie). Over time the tactic became a strategy and the democratic-bourgeois state an insurmountable horizon. The interests of the poor would be secured by opposing to the "private" (and above all "monopolistic") forces of capital, the "universal" power of the state. Thus the state planning of the economy and the public funding of scientific research were already at the forefront of socialism.

We can see a similar pattern in the international mobilisations against globalization: neoliberal policies have been adopted by institutions that are now hostage to the multinationals (and financial capital) and emptied of all "sovereignty". Should it then be surprising if certain popular sectors see behind the Covid-19 epidemic the hand of "Big Pharma" and in the constitution the only line of defence and source of legitimacy for its "resistance"? The pattern is

Obviously, since 2003 the enemy "has neither slept nor idled." The mechanization of decisional power (data harvesting, development of algorithms, automated implementation of commands) entails an inevitable reduction in the number of decision-makers. "Science obliges us" mostly means this. This fact is so notorious that even pale EU bureaucrats managed to write: "developing robotics may lead to a high concentration of wealth and influence in the hands of a minority." (European Parliament Resolution on Robotics, February 16, 2017)

Certain names (especially the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation) or certain entities (Big Pharma) seem to have deliberately been spread to mix elements of truth with hints of an occult, private orchestration behind the emergency. Those who promote the Bill Gates-mastermind theory (a thesis that is gaining traction) as a "conspiracy theory delusion" are the same government leaders who invite the founder of Microsoft to their G20 as an exterior advisor on health and vaccines... Talking about Gates could be an excellent way to avoid recognizing the small and concrete *destroyers of humanity* at work in the university departments dedicated to Artificial Intelligence or in the biotechnology and nanotechnology laboratories completely financed with public funds.

If someone were in the mood to read the massive *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, they could observe that the critique on the "imperialism of health care and vaccines" (above all through LARCs – the slow-release "contraceptives" that aim to prevent poor women from becoming pregnant for years) practised by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, was already undertaken years ago by intellectuals and historians from both the academic and the militant fronts... Vandana Shiva¹⁵ didn't wait for Covid-19 to denounce the "benefactor" imperialism that

¹⁵ Vandana Shiva is an Indian activist, mostly known for her opposition to GMOs and globalization.

planned media strategy. Everyone thought it was a sensible and materialistic explanation. Nobody talked about a “conspiracy” and not one opponent to the war was qualified as “conspiracy theorist.” The same happened some months ago during the Palestinian revolt against the Israeli *apartheid* policies. It wasn’t called a “conspiracy” that all mass media presented the Gaza bombings as a response to Hamas’ rockets (bombings that were arguably disproportionate) and that the solidarity demonstrations in half the world were largely ignored. Those who denounced a precise political-media strategy were not labelled “conspiracy theorists.” Nobody thought of an obscure umbrella consisting of governments, politicians and journalists. It was just a convergence of interests.

So why call “conspiracy theory” the claim that the management of the Covid-19 epidemic by almost all governments not only corresponds to functional elements but also to a well-defined strategy?

The programme to vaccinate billions of people (which implies the massive injection of the idea that this would be the only solution to “win the war against the virus”) is born out of a similar convergence of powers that declared “war on terror” to justify bombings. Bombs or vaccines, these are two moves stemming from the same command centres. The statement made by Joe Biden at the latest G7 could not have been more clear: “We are the biggest arsenal in the global fight against the virus.” A fight in which the “short-sighted competition” between the different pharmaceutical multinationals and geopolitical conflict between states tend, nevertheless, to jeopardize *gains*. On this point the editors of *The Economist* wrote: “Imagine an investment that would earn a return of 17,900% in four years. Better yet, the initial outlay would be easily affordable. Who on Earth would pass up such an opportunity? The answer, it seems, is the leaders of the Group of Seven (G7), a club of rich democracies which holds its annual summit this week. By failing to act fast enough to inoculate the world against Covid-19, they are passing up the deal of the century.”

similar: scientific research is bent to the interests of a few and the universal mission of the state is undermined by governments sold out to big finance. That’s more or less what those who demand “vaccines as a common good” put forward but in a less logical and coherent manner. Can a product ever be a “common good” when it is developed and sold by “Big Pharma”, in addition to being authorized by regulatory bodies that it itself funds? Not seeing how the *intentions* of pharmaceutical (and digital) multinationals are made possible by the *function* of technological development, carries a huge simplification (which exonerates the social system and calls again on the state, on the judges, on new Nuremberg trials). Would it be more realistic to demand that these multinationals give up on their patents and transfer their technologies to the poorest countries? Does it demonstrate a greater understanding of how the industrial apparatus – private and public – of techno-science works?

Some – certainly a bit more discerning about the relationship between state and capital – want “proletarian committees” to take charge of the mass vaccination, since bourgeois institutions cannot free themselves of the power of “Big Pharma”. Nevertheless, the Stalinists are right: the state is necessary for such an undertaking. But clearer than either of them are the thousands of people – mostly women – who took to the streets shouting “we are not guinea pigs!” The ‘folkloric’ idea that Bill Gates wants to reduce the global population through vaccines, is certainly closer to the truth than the *progressive illusion* according to which techno-scientific development is not only neutral, but even a factor of emancipation...

The majority of diseases that affect humanity demand not very technological solutions like clean water, enough food, decent incomes. Technological development doesn’t solve these questions, in fact, it only worsens them, while captivating us with its “imminent, but always around the corner” promises. In 2020 alone, 500,000 children died of starvation in Mozambique. And what is the priority for certain alleged internationalists? To deliver

GMO vaccines to that population. Exactly what the eugenis – and sterilizers of poor women – who developed the AstraZeneca vaccine want...⁶ And not only to give them the vaccines but also the technologies to develop and produce them autonomously. This means setting up biotechnology research centres (where highly specialised researchers and technicians specialized in Artificial Intelligence, bioinformatics, molecular biology, nanotechnology etc. can form a new local workforce) and constructing, just like that, at least two high-tech factories where vaccines can be produced autonomously. Factories which, it goes without saying, are connected to a powerful digital network. In this beautiful fairy tale (whose subconscious is well-meaning imperialism), such research centres and industries will renounce, once the vaccinations are over, the duties for which they were historically created. The objective is to boost dependance (on the terrains of energy, agriculture, health, economy, society, politics) of the local population on centralised and heteronomous institutions, whose insatiable extractive motor squeezes humans, sterilises soils and provokes epidemics. Wouldn't it be more practical to spend the money on a network of small health centres in villages where sick people can be treated fast, rather than on indiscriminately vaccinating millions of people? Of course it would be, but the objective of the biotech market is exactly to make the “ordinary work of care and prevention” obsolete and unprofitable.

⁶ This seems to be a reference to the professional links two of the lead developers have with the Wellcome Trust, a charity which seems rather concerned about population control and is invested in the promotion of semi-permanent birth control methods in the Global South – which has been criticised not only for its questionable motives but also for the intrinsic power imbalances (access to information, other options, etc.), use of experimental methods, neglect of serious side-effects, etc. – as well as hosting the archives of the Galton Institute, formerly known as the Eugenics Society. Eugenics is about the improvement of the “genetic quality” of human beings through “selective breeding” and is the forerunner to contemporary human genetics research.

more intelligent machines because *fed* with more data, more powerful servers, etc.) by taking over a CIA-controlled company, *Keyhole*, to then transform it into *Google Earth*. Augmented Reality, 5G, Internet of Things, drones, facial recognition, surveillance software, quantum cryptography, the first mRNA vaccines... are all marvels born from the collaboration between digital companies, biotechnological and nanotechnological laboratories and the military-industrial complex. The same goes for the Progetto Genoma Umano in Italy, for deCODE in Iceland, for UmanGenomics in Sweden, for UK Biobank in Britain or CeleraDiagnostics in the USA. “Market socialism” instead of “liberal democracy”, the merger process is no different in China.

As early as April last year, a certain professor at MIT (an institution that is a real incubator of transhumanists) prophesied that there wouldn't be a “post-pandemic” and that we would have to get used to digital certificates to access certain places or services. What else was he doing but informing us on what his colleagues in the neighbouring laboratories were doing? The same is true of Bill Gates' “prophecies”, Amazon's projects or IBM's announcements.

“If transhumanism advances without difficulties, it's because technocracy sells it under the banner of economical rationality” (and we could add, medical hope). “The transhumanist project is *another name for growth*.”

xii. A large arsenal

In 2003, the neo-conservative George Bush Jr. and the neo-Labourist Tony Blair declare war on Iraq under the pretext that Saddam Hussein's regime possessed weapons of mass destruction. The “Coalition of the Willing” participated in the bombings of Operation *Enduring Freedom* with the support of Western media. At the time, the opposition movement in the streets talked about the lie that masked the real objective of the war and an internationally

long commentary on a Microsoft advertisement) explains rather clearly that the (transhuman) future belongs to the intertwined development of informatics and bio-nano-neurotechnologies. In front of this technoscience café public, the future minister doesn't hide that the road to a total interconnection of men and machine is still long. But he also reminds that "appetite comes with eating."

In the 20th century, Nazi biopolitics were at the forefront of fulfilling the theories of "racial degeneration." These theories had been developed by the Anglo-Saxon eugenist movement of the 19th century, which in turn were rooted in the field practices of British colonialism. Certain experiments wouldn't have left the laboratories without the power war between states (either Berlin, or Los Alamos¹⁴).

Günther Anders defined the technological system as "the national-socialist community of machines" with his famous technique of exaggeration (aiming to grasp the "supraliminal", i.e. something whose effects are immeasurable and impossible for the senses and imagination to perceive). He wanted to say that the machines have to be understood in their global, combined effects, but also that, if we are attentive to the noise that comes from "the steel lips of the machine," we can hear the same slogan as the Brownshirts ("... and tomorrow the whole world!").

How did transhumanism (whose first *Manifesto* was published by Natasha Vita-More in 1983, the same year in which the first computer data was stored) stopped being an exercise in anti-humanist futurology to become a real headquarter of power? Once again, thanks to the power war between states. In fact, it's after September 11th 2001 that the Silicon Valley start-ups (created by MIT's brightest nerds), the CIA and the Pentagon's Research Department merge. The founders of Google make their first big leap forward (in the financial sense and thus as an infrastructure:

¹⁴ The secret Los Alamos Laboratory was where the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were developed.

v. Unresolved knots

Cui prodest? Who benefits? The question is as necessary as insufficient, and the answers can sometimes be misleading. It is not necessarily the case that those who exploit the consequences of an event also caused it. Among the many examples we could give, we choose two that belong to the history of the revolutionary movement: the fire in the Reichstag and the bomb at the Diana theatre. The first act – carried out by the Dutch council communist Marinus van der Lubbe – provided the nazis with the pretext for a vicious witch-hunt against all dissidents. For a long time (and still today in quite a number of history books wrongly considered reliable) the arson at the German parliament was considered a nazi conspiracy (exactly, *cui prodest?*) and the comrade van der Lubbe, a provocateur. Theories that were mainly – and obviously – supported by the Stalinists. At the time, the arsonist was only defended by some anarchist groups (like *L'Adunata dei Refrattari*), by German-Dutch council communists and by some Italian left-communist newspapers (and even among the few communists who defended him, some nevertheless insisted on politically criticizing his action...). This "nazi conspiracy" has been such a widespread historical falsehood that we even find it back in one of the first pamphlets that unveiled the origin of the bombs of December 12th 1969, which had the hand of the state and the bosses behind them. The text in question, signed "some friends of the International" and distributed a couple of weeks after the massacre at Piazza Fontana, was entitled "Is the Reichstag burning?" (implying that the Italian state had carried out this bloody provocation while pointing at the anarchists as its authors, just as the nazis had set fire to the German parliament and blamed the communists for it). That the two deeds represent diametrically opposed ways of using incendiary-explosive devices (setting fire to the organ of passive representation of the 'working people', of depletion of its remaining potential for action and of validation

of state oppression, on one hand, and on the other randomly striking a mass of farmers) didn't prevent them from ending up under the same heading: conspiracy. The effects are observed but the dynamics are not analysed (conditioned by the prejudice that only collective action can be a legitimate answer to oppression). Nevertheless, as history is the outcome of an entanglement of forces (and the unforeseen) even the analysis of dynamics can at times be misleading. On March 23rd 1921, when reading the news of the Diana theatre massacre, many comrades immediately thought it was a police provocation. Not only because of the fierce hunt for subversives it unleashed (in short: *cui prodest?*), but also because of the dynamics of the action itself. Firstly, because of the target itself: a theatre also visited by common people, and secondly because of the methods of the attack: a very powerful bomb. At first, it was difficult to understand that it was instead the unforeseen effect of an action carried out by some young and well-known comrades who wanted to "hit not the theatre, but the hotel above it, which, according to the information then in possession of the attackers, was regularly used as a meeting place between Benito Mussolini and Gasti, the police chief of Milan. Both of them merciless enemies of the anarchists and despised by them. Particularly, it was believed that Gasti was inside the hotel that evening" (Giuseppe Mariani⁷).

All of this to say that it should be the revolutionaries themselves who should be wary of mechanically applying the logic of *cui prodest?*

If we would apply this logic to the Covid-19 emergency, the conclusion would be perfectly clear: it has been mainly the digital and pharmaceutical multinationals that have benefited from this

⁷ The anarchist Giuseppe Mariani (1898-1974) was convicted to life imprisonment for his involvement in this and other attacks, released after the end of World War II.

viet" regime, under which "one never knows what the past would hold in store for us" – wrote: "the future, in its totality, is a lie.")

The historical development of technoscience also has the avant-garde that suits it: the transhumanist movement. Transhumanism asserts in a programmatic manner what the technological machine carries out silently. As a vanguard, transhumanism claims that its role is to overcome all the barriers that prevent the conscious accomplishment of what humanity has pursued unconsciously until now (Western humanity of course, which counts for *all* humanity). Hasn't it always altered matter and its surrounding? Hasn't its religion presented the curse of living as a the fruits of Guilt: "you will gain your bread by the sweat of your brow" and "in pain you will give birth"? Haven't its most esteemed philosophers taught that the body is the tomb of the soul? Hasn't it always sought to overcome the fear of death through the promise of Paradise? And now these curses can be overcome and these promises can be fulfilled thanks to technological developments. Vital processes can be recombined in laboratories. Generalised automatism can abolish the physical punishment of work. Reproduction can become artificial. Performances and perceptions can be enhanced. Limbs and brains can hybridize with machines. Death can be defeated. The means for this integral programme already exist: Augmented Reality, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, synthetic biology. Nevertheless, they have to be expanded without limits and connected in an intelligent world to function correctly. Why do the measures to deal with the SARS-CoV-2 epidemic and the announced *Recovery* programmes, bear a sinister resemblance to what transhumanism aims for? We can find an answer in the *Nanotecnologie per l'essere umano* conference by Roberto Cingolani at the University of Milan in 2014 (available online). The research projects he funds and organises now as minister for "ecological transition" are the same projects he promoted so fervently in his time as director of the Italian Institute of Technology. The conference (a 35 minutes

Only a civilisation that separates the body from the mind, and the individual from their relationships, can think that isolation and the profusion of fear will not contribute to lowering the immunity defences of human beings, and thus will not become itself a source of diseases (“The idea and means of health are variable and depend directly on the cosmology in which they are located”).

“Which moral judgement will be passed on those who will choose to live “in the silence of the organs”?” in this world under construction, made of genetic diagnostics, of predictive screenings and of ingestible nano-sensors with which we can remotely check for “proto-diseases”.

We can already answer by thinking of those who – in the midst of a pandemic! – would rather put their trust in symptoms than tests, or of those who refuse biotechnological bricolage vaccines. Irresponsible, conspiracy theorists, negationists, Talibans of the physical experience, traitors of the nation, deserters when faced with the enemy in the hour of danger.

xi. An inhuman avant-garde

The manifestos issued by the (artistic, political, scientific) vanguard in general stated their programmatic objectives. Those who claim to interpret the zeitgeist in which they live and to anticipate the coming one, will almost always celebrate the historical movement which created their existence as the avant-garde and the historical laws that justify their role. Progressivism and futurology go well together. (That anarchists always thought of themselves as an active minority and not as an avant-garde is an ethical and “political” gesture which is not at all accidental. Walter Benjamin’s invitation to redeem past injustices by revolutionary action instead of trusting a bright future, is an ethical and “political” gesture which is also far from accidental. It is by no means accidental that a poet like Joseph Brodsky – incarcerated for “social parasitism” by the “so-

emergency, *thus* they have planned it. *Posto hoc, ergo propter hoc* (After this, therefore caused by this).⁸

Nevertheless it would be naive to think that the acceleration towards the digitalisation of society and a worldwide vaccination programme are just two *functional* answers to a totally unforeseen event: the spread of SARS-CoV-2.

In order to get a better idea of what is functional and what is intentional, we need to understand what the fundamental tendencies of our times are. So let’s return to two unresolved knots: the technological question and the question of the state.

vi. Melting point

I thought long about how to define in the most precise manner the relationship between technology and capitalist development. I find the two most current ideas on the subject totally wrong, as history shows. The first – common to both the liberal democratic and the Marxist vision – considers technology as a totality of methods of rationalisation and organisation with variable political-economical ends. While the second sees technique as an autonomous subject of history (the history of a fracture between human beings and their prostheses, in which the difference between a wind mill and a nuclear power plant would only be a question of degrees). Until now, I found the most appropriate adjective to define this relationship in a beautiful book about the luddite insurrection: *consubstantial*⁹. Enclosures and the plundering of colonial wealth were the two original sources of accumulation of English capitalism. However, the basis for the development of manufacturing and of mechanization was provided by the might of the

⁸ The phrase is commonly used to indicate a typical fallacy of induction when a relationship of cause and effect is wrongly assumed based on a simple observation of order of appearance.

⁹ Consubstantial means being of the same substance or essence.

British Empire at war with the Spanish state and then with the French state. Both the railways and the exploitation of coal mines were born out of these war necessities, while electricity was developed to produce weapons. Before illuminating private homes, it was used to run factories at night. This relation of mutual involvement between military power, industrial development and acceleration of technique, produced a leap: technology. This can be described as the application of increasingly specialised scientific knowledge to an industrial production that replaced little by little all forms of community-based and non-centralised production.

The two World Wars were the *laboratory* of a new fusion: between scientific research, military institutions, industrial planning and state bureaucracy. The Second World War also added mass media to the fusion. And thanks to gigantic military, medical and toxicological experiments, it kickstarted what we can call technoscience and its social-political form: technocracy. Technological development – the propelling force of capitalist accumulation – has itself become the *motor* of economic competition (as well as the continuation of politics by other means) in the same way that the totalising logic of profit grows and becomes autonomous in feudal society. “Political regimes change, technocracy stays.” It was within the clash of power between states – direct agents of industrial planning – during the ‘40s and ‘50s that paradigms were developed (cybernetics) and research programmes were launched (computer science and genetic engineering, as well as nuclear power). Without these there would have been neither the financialisation of the economy (and its neoliberal policies) nor the concept to enter human bodies as a further space of capitalist conquest. These processes of fusion between private and state – which someone has called techno-bureaucracy – have been lucidly grasped by spirits less mesmerized by the sirens of progress and the alleged “emancipatory” development of the productive forces: Simone Weil, George Orwell, Dwight MacDonald, Georges Henein... All were more or less mocked because they were inter-

we don’t know)¹³ nor how to *favour* a natural response of the organism. This paradigm being that the individual is reduced to the information that its cells exchange with the surrounding. The *susceptibility* to disease – independently of age, of mental and physical health conditions, etc. – justified mass lockdowns, while awaiting the equally mass *Remedy* (regardless of the subject’s already developed, natural antibodies). Why? For the gigantic profits of the pharmaceutical industry, of course. But also because of the belief that “genetic information” introduced into the organism through nanotechnologies are more *efficient* than a spontaneous response of the body. And also because the genetics industry is made up of “body hunters” (as *The Washington Post* called them in 2000) who were delighted with the possibility to broaden the hunt to a planetary level. Finally, because mass vaccination – in contrast to home cures done without applause, without generals and heroes – allows the state to present itself as the saviour and benefactor of public health. This means an opportunity to strengthen its power and to unleash it on society. First as a police measure, and later as a programmatic extension to “normality” of what happened as an “emergency.”

Disease “is what irritates men in the normal course of their lives and work,” wrote Leriche (as previously quoted). Isn’t this definition perfectly adapted to the manner in which the state managed the epidemic? As to the additional burden of suffering; what to say about the elderly left to die without a last goodbye with their loved ones? What to say about the impossibility of sharing and expressing grief? What to say about the increasing instances of domestic violence against women? What to say about the suicides? And the many young people still panicking at the idea of leaving the house?

¹³ We do know now, despite many – including decision-makers – still not having processed that the virus is transmitted through respiratory droplets and not through contact as is evidenced by the omnipresence of disinfectant gels and the general lack of ventilation systems (or lack of differentiation between outdoor and indoor activities).

During the pre-genomics era, we would isolate the sick from the healthy. As neither virus sequencing nor molecular tests existed, neither did “cases”, “positives” and “asymptomatics”. In the experience, socially lived, rather than diagnosed on a molecular scale, there existed the silence of the organs or suffering and death. What has this prodigious technological civilisation done faced with an epidemic that’s neither the plague nor ebola? Did it immediately listen to the organs with instruments perfected thanks to its innovations? No. It treated millions of individuals – largely living “in the silence of the organs” – as potentially infected, the infected as sick, and the sick as nearly-dead, which only heroic war medicine could save from a dreadful fate. It doesn’t stop there. It didn’t isolate the sick from the healthy in the RSAs¹². It also didn’t separate at hospital admissions the Covid patients from those affected by other diseases. It also discouraged in every way the intervention of local medicine, rather ordinary and not very innovative. It renewed the lockdowns and curfews, even after the virus had been circulating for over a year and had already infected millions of people, while continuing to allow sick people to end up in hospitals on oxygen. Panic, unpreparedness, weight of neoliberal policies? Yes, of course. But to a lesser extent. The apparatus did what it was programmed to do: not apply innovations to health, but make of diseases an opportunity to increase innovations. Thanks to genetic engineering, a first variant of the virus was sequenced (the Wuhan one). Some months later, vaccines were developed based on this sequencing (thanks to Artificial Intelligence, bioinformatics, molecular biology and nanotechnology). The cybernetic paradigm was applied on a mass scale, while showing no interest in understanding how the virus takes root (airborne or intestinal infection,

¹² *Residenze sanitarie assistenziali* are living units where people, who need some form of medical care independent from hospitals, stay for a variable period of time (from weeks to indefinite).

ested in “secondary” aspects and disregarded the impersonal laws of capital. Their analyses described with precision the intrinsically hierarchical nature of big industries (regardless of who detains the legal ownership of the means of production), as well as the omnivorous extension of state bureaucracy. What was certain, however, was that the pivot of industrial planning was science – at the service of capital – and that *long range planning* was the most logical articulation of that pivot. However, thanks to enormous state funding, that pivot has been totally integrated in the control panel, turning on its head the relation between means and ends. Yet, the “technological revolution” has shattered any planning – always too slow and costly compared to the innovations of applied sciences. It remains true that “the basis on which technology is gaining power over society is the power of those whose economic position in society is the strongest” (Max Horkheimer & Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*) With this fundamental addition: this technocracy is not a “revolution” but a permanent *putsch*. Exactly because “the technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself. It is the coercive nature of society alienated from itself,” its process of becoming autonomous encounters no limits *within the dynamics of this alienation*.

Technological development has a relative contradiction (workers’ struggles) and an absolute contradiction (the irreducibility of human and other living beings to the machine). Technocracy will increasingly bypass the first one to aim directly at the second. Just as the state repression of the revolutionary movement in the ‘60s and ‘70s allowed and accompanied the introduction of telecommunication into production, the current employers’ and police attack against workers’ resistance in the logistics sectors is preparing the general imposition of the “Amazon model”. The state and employers had wiped out the “contractual” force of the working class (through the combined use of coercive force and technological innovations) to eliminate the proletarian offensive of the ‘60s and ‘70s. This workforce was the product of a specific production

model – fixed factories, storage costs of goods, need of a large and unskilled workforce – and for this very reason capable of a “scientific” use of absenteeism and sabotage. On a smaller scale, the digitalisation of logistics also aims to eliminate its own relative contradiction, expressed in workers’ blockages and pickets (the forms of struggle that the state outlawed with its “security decrees”). To think nowadays that technological development is a secondary factor in class conflict means to live on another planet. When some particularly pretentious Marxist mocks our “fears” (typically “petit-bourgeois”!) for the ongoing techno-totalitarian development, and defends that “technological dynamism” (which would be more announced than real) is only the symptom of a capitalist valorization that is floundering, he shows the depths of his lack of realism. Consequently, the identification of what is at stake is just as unrealistic: fighting for a general reduction of the working day, a “minimal programme” that would be made possible by technological innovations.

If anything, history shows that the fight to reduce the workload presupposes a durable capacity for self-organisation – exactly what robotics and automatisisation undermine. The mass unemployment that digitalisation provokes and will provoke even more, produces a docile workforce. The fairy tale according to which technological development would free – if not automatically, at least under pressure of the class conflict – human beings from drudgery has always been a technocratic tale. Living labour is growing exponentially – the *material* digital apparatus is based on the forced activity of millions of human beings – but it is as technologically connected as it is socially fragmented. The demand of a shorter work day is therefore first of all *political* (and clashes with another political option: the universal basic income). Is it really more unrealistic to demand the immediate end to production that destroys humans and their surroundings, namely to protest against our *expulsion from the world*?

x. Hunting parties

More than a century ago the French medical practitioner René Leriche wrote that “health is life in the silence of the organs” while disease “is what irritates men in the normal course of their lives and work, and above all, what makes them suffer.”

Around fifteen years ago a sociologist pointed out the tendency of the concepts of “risk profile” and “susceptibility” towards “molecular precision.” Combined with the development of genetic engineering, millions of “asymptomatic sick people” and “pre-patients” afflicted by “pre-diseases” were produced. This sociologist concluded asking himself: “Which moral judgement would be made of those who will choose to live “in the silence of the organs”?” Quarantining is a practice that historically precedes capitalism and the birth of the modern state. To counter the outbreaks of contagion, ensuring that these do not spread, was a measure deemed sensible, even in periods when medicine didn’t carry the label of science, but was simply considered an art (the same as painting, sculpting, music or architecture). An art subject to dominant representations, just like science today. The medical practitioners that dared defy their congregations were few. Among them; Hippocrates and Paracelsus. The former claiming that epilepsy wasn’t a disease of divine origin, the latter that the plague wasn’t spread by the jews. In recent times, we should mention those who recognized and swiftly denounced the harmfulness of asbestos, of nuclear radiation or of GMOs in agriculture. These wise and courageous contemporaries are not many. As is well known, the plague wasn’t defeated thanks to a particular medical cure, but through improved hygienic conditions. In a similar manner, without putting an end to the industrial war against nature and the living, the “pandemic century” is neither a doomsday prophecy nor a health scare, but technocracy’s “collateral damage”, as well as an opportunity for its further leap forward.

administrations, health care, colleges and universities goes towards the same aim. To point out that the bosses create Industry (and Agriculture) 4.0 with “our money” is not a stupidity. But what is stupid, is to think that the distinction between public and private is relevant in judging a state programme. “Our money” certainly, but to evict us from the world. As has been said before, the technocrats’ profusion grows along with their means. The more they can, the more they want. No need for “conspiracy theories”. It’s enough to “cross the bridge when you come to it.”

The PNRR systemises everything that the emergency has accelerated, under the pretext of leaving the emergency behind. It’s enough to observe the optimism of science popularisers (a profession with a promising future, considering the sudden sprouting – like poisonous mushrooms – of special undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes) when they announced that the Covid-19 epidemic brought down the cultural obstacles that had separated us from a world at a distance. Of course there are still the “Taliban of physical experience”, but the politics of the *fait accompli* (aka scorched earth tactic) will take care of them: either techno-citizen or clandestine. After having learned how technology improved our locked-down lives, why not apply it to *everything*? “It wouldn’t be the end of the world,” assures professor Derrick de Kerckhove “but only the end of our comfortable and illusory autonomy.” A triviality in the calculation of costs and benefits. How would we have coped, during the lockdowns, without internet, remote working, online classes, telemedicine, online consultations, online shopping, Artificial Intelligence, genomics¹¹, biotechnology and nanotechnology? Seriously, how would we have managed?

¹¹ Genomics is the study of genes on an aggregate level (a genome being all the genetic information of an organism), as opposed to genetics which looks at genes on an individual level. Known for developing DNA sequencing technologies.

vii. Blitzkrieg

Often, throughout history, effects have in turn become causes. The financialisation of the economy – impossible without informatics, Artificial Intelligence, data science and the huge material apparatuses on which they are based – affects in turn the techno-industrial development. A statement of the obvious. “Decisions seem to arise automatically from a *black box* of an *objective* calculation mechanism.” The technological solution thus tends to abolish any ethical judgement and any political action.

Let’s return for a moment to the relationship between permanent innovation and industrial planning. The nuclear industry – the outcome of the power war between states and the massive funding of science that made it possible – is the most macroscopic example of state planning for a centralised, militarised and – above all – fixed system. On top of this state production of energy are built other fixed infrastructures (such as high-speed train lines) and high-tech laboratories that continuously disrupt the forms and modes of production of commodities, the extraction and treatment of raw materials, urban renewal, territorial control, and the forms and means of war. The same could be said of submarine cables, the installation and defence of which is itself a matter of geopolitical and military conflict. We can be rather certain that in a couple of decades the nuclear power plants, the railways and the submarine cables will exist more or less as we know them today (in the absence of a radical upheaval of society). On the contrary, we don’t have the faintest idea – except through a few exercises in critical futurology – of how bread or cars will be produced, nor how payments will be made, nor how bodies will be cured. It’s this totalitarian acceleration of innovation that has been called a *permanent technological putsch*. If the imperative of extension and the imperative of depth push the techno-scientific apparatus to conquer every shred of human experience and transform it in data, to discuss whether a policy is neoliberal or neo-Keynesian is simply

ridiculous. Firstly, because it is evident that digitalisation – with its vampire-like machine learning – can only accelerate the forward flight of finance (with the corresponding material effects: *just-in-time* opening and closing of executive, logistical and productive centres). Secondly, because state planning follows the same logic – tending towards the technological administration of territories and populations. We only have to read the official reports of the army (the planning institution par excellence) to see this. Since high-tech innovation – from drones to killer robots, from cyberwarfare to genetically enhanced soldiers’ bodies – has already merged Defence institutions and research centres, the political direction of programmes is increasingly being transferred from the military bureaucracy (as fixed as a nuclear plant) to inter-university departments. They in turn are increasingly linked to the demands of Industry 4.0. Whatever the enemies of neoliberalism may say, the high-tech economy is a firmly interventionist economy. The media popularisers of the technocratic Word have waited until the Covid-19 emergency to enthusiastically announce it: the state is back. (To understand that it had never gone away, it would have been enough to look at the constant increase of the so-called public debt.) It’s no coincidence that the hired sociologists and economists make reference to the military organisation effort supported by the USA in the Second World War as a precedent for the current state intervention in industrial financing. What is being prepared is precisely a war economy. Does this also imply the return of planning? Social-democrats and Stalinists hope so, pushing the “movements” to insert a bit of socialism in the state plans. The most critical Marxists uncover the ideological scam, because the money for a New Deal isn’t available since capitalism isn’t in a phase of expansion but of crisis. In reality, the “return of the state” isn’t the return of industrial long range planning. It’s the suppression *manu militari* of any obstacle on the road to a permanent technological putsch, in other words the dictatorship of machines, experts and military.

absolutely nothing, you can do in the face of Covid-19, neither to understand anything about it, nor to strengthen your immune defences, nor even treat yourself when symptoms appear. (Not once in the daily chronicles of fear did an “expert” provide the slightest medical indication besides “wear a mask, keep social distance and wash your hands”. A chorus that even a postman could have repeated, or, according to Lenin, a cook¹⁰)

ix. Men on the bridge

Let’s take a look at the *Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza* (National Recovery and Resilience Plan) of prime minister Draghi and his government. We should throw out useless and misleading interpretive frameworks if we want to understand the societal project it pursues (an important point because it affects us directly and, above all, because it shows the tendencies of this era). The PNRR is part of the Next Generation EU programme, which, in turn, is an enlarged version of the European Horizon 2020 programme. It’s an explicit example of a technocratic programme. Is technocracy classist and anti-environmental? Without a doubt and to a high degree. But not all classist and anti-environmental policies – which exist all along the history of capitalism – are technocratic to the same extent. Today, technocracy is the *political* organisation of convergent technologies: informatics, genetic engineering, nanotechnology and neurotechnology. Of the 50 billion euros allocated to “sustainable energy transition”, as many as 25 are outright grants for companies. The left militant will repeat: “Public money for the bosses: the continuation of neoliberal recipes.” This is a totally mistaken interpretation. Not only because it says nothing about where the money is going to (robotics, automatisaton, quantum computing, Artificial Intelligence, data science, etc.), but because it overlooks the fact that the money to reorganize public

¹⁰ As in the quote attributed to Lenin: “Every cook can govern.”

world” (Stefania Consigliere & Cristina Zavaroni, *Ammalarsi di paura*). That’s not all, they also contributed to the creation of a glut of “strong men” (leaders ready to meet with flame throwers students who “gathered” to celebrate their diploma, ministerial advisers who want to make vaccination mandatory and to legally punish anyone who criticizes it...). Some say that the proof for the absence of an emergency command centre is found in the disorganized manner the regions and national state acted. They haven’t reflected much on the spiralling and cascading effects that technocratic command has always had throughout history. To have at one’s disposal the liberty of thousands of people in the name of a higher cause or of the compelling necessity of *efficiency*, strengthens the competition between national and local leaders in showing themselves more decisive than others. The feeling of being part of the few who matured thanks to science – or by politics acting in the name of science – unfailingly leads to despising and infantilising all others. Nietzsche understood it well: the mechanization of subhumans finds its historical fulfilment and moral justification in the *Übermensch*. Once it took the path of war rhetoric, the media has eagerly aligned itself with what had been decided in the command centres. Not only because of the funding it receives and the pressure it is under, but also because of a self-feeding mimetic power. The smalltime, provincial journalist feels important and even morally superior when calling on their fellow citizens to follow government decrees. In a total mobilisation when to act responsibly we have to do everything that authority says, even the snitch sees themselves as an agent of Good.

Faced with a sufficiently scary threat, the “totalisation of public discourse” produces two combined effects on society. On the one hand the strengthening of national-popular unity which pushes the individual to not perceive themselves as a “gram” but rather as “one millionth of a ton” (E.I. Zamiatine, *We*). On the other hand, a paralysing feeling of individual powerlessness – there’s nothing,

As someone has summarized: what is prepared at an accelerated pace is an era of flaws and mishaps.

Yes, the “technological revolution” that replaces uniformly all the old modes of production, is a myth. Technology has the pace of a *Blitzkrieg*. Not only is this advance relentlessly being prepared by the cross-over of research centres, industry, mass media and public institutions (with the discrete presence of the military), but it determines *all* economical and social spheres. If, in the global market the goods with the highest value rate are those that incorporate the most data and the highest scientific development, other sectors – less high-tech or not at all – must increase unpaid labour in order to resist the competition. Only then does the human being remains overall more profitable than technological investments. The example of the Chinese state is emblematic. Smart cities and labour camps are two communicating vessels of the same technocracy. Try telling a Chinese worker, who is tracked in every movement, that the digitalisation of the world is a myth just because billions of anti-Covid masks are produced every day in an essentially 19th century manner.

viii. Grams and tons

When we hear the word “totalitarian”, we mainly associate it to “police”. That’s a reductive and misleading interpretation. A totalitarian economy is an economy that doesn’t leave any human experience outside of its hold. Doing away with the police – or rather, making the police the unfettered organisation of the city, *citizen science* – is a technocrats’ utopia. Precisely because of the human and environmental cost of technologisation, as concealed as it is disproportionate, it produces a *differentiated apocalypse*. For some, slavery in coltan mines and shortage of water and food; for others remote working and the risk of obesity. For millions of women in the Global South veiled programmes of forced sterilisation; for

thousands of women in the North access to assisted reproductive technology. For the workers who assemble smartphones, labour camps; for the upperclass, a poolside video call with their genetics adviser.

Above all, what most distinguishes a totalitarian system is the disappearance of the criteria for understanding facts (and then to separate the facts from their manipulation), the elimination of the capacity to develop one's own experience, the obsolescence of the faculty to grasp with one's senses and intellect the "resolute mystery" that is the product of one's own social activity.

Readers of *1984* will probably remember the pages that Orwell dedicates to Big Brother's announcements concerning chocolate rations. Thanks to the permanent suppression of the past, the announcement of an increase of rations, which is actually smaller than the one announced the previous week, is received with hysterically enthusiastic ovations by the Party members. It becomes impossible for the dissidents to prove otherwise, since the data are gradually erased from the archives. *1984* isn't a "dystopic novel". Stalin abolished the unemployment benefits to prove that in the so-called Soviet Union the problem of unemployment had been resolved thanks to state economic plans. The abolition of unemployment benefits was the objective proof that unemployment no longer existed.

In the internet age it isn't possible to delete archives. But it's rather easy to direct searches thanks to appropriate algorithms as well as discourage people from consulting them. How many, given the triumphalist announcements that SARS-CoV-2 infections and death rates had dropped thanks to the vaccine, wanted to look up the numbers for the corresponding period of the previous year? In the meantime, the WHO has changed the parameters to detect "cases" since also vaccinated people can become infected (we will understand to which extent and with which consequences in the fall or winter, when the circulation of the virus will increase). The WHO set a maximum threshold to amplification cycles for PCR

tests and introduced the criterium of a double verification to declare positivity. In short, the unemployment benefits are not abolished to make the unemployed disappear, but one declares part of them happily employed. Then, should the technocratic machine give ground to dissent, because of the clear failures of its solutions, its blitzkrieg against nature will already have found another threat to oil its gears. Will the industrial slaughter of poultry on intensive farms currently carried out in half of the world (Italy included) be enough to stop the jump of the bird flu to humans? To be seen. To turn an increasingly pathogenic world into "a perfectly sanitised desert" is a utopia that is as inhumane as unrealisable.

Is there anything more obscure than that "black box" that directs decisions based on algorithms developed by machine learning? Is there something that provokes a more complete moral haze than the one cultivated by the tyranny of efficacy?

In an article titled *Wanted: An Unpractical Man*, the eccentric conservative G.K. Chesterton said that practical solutions can be useful when something goes wrong, but when things go very wrong, we don't need a practical man but a thinker and if possible "white-haired and more absent-minded". In itself, efficiency is a misleading criterium. "If a man is murdered, the murder was efficient. A tropical sun is as efficient in making people lazy as a Lancashire foreman bully in making them energetic." And "efficiency, of course, is futile for the same reason that strong men, will-power and the superman are futile. That is, it is futile because it only deals with actions after they have been performed. It has no philosophy for incidents before they happen; therefore it has no power of choice." This is what millions of people have experienced during the management of the Covid-19 epidemic. The techno-bureaucratic hierarchies (the so-called experts) provoked – more than an "epistemological darkness" – a real "cognitive paralysis", "a terrible situation which recalls what happens in circumstances constructed specifically to de-humanise subjects through the dissociation of words and things, of language and the