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The End of Political Futures?

David Forgacs

Italy in the modern era has had many versions of future-oriented political thought. The principal Risorgimento ideologies, even as they looked back to the past for inspiration or legitimation, all involved visionary projections into the future, from Gioberti's moderate confederation of Italian states under the Papacy to Mazzini's democratic Italian republic within a federal Europe. These ideas themselves drew on earlier invocations of a better political future for Italy, in which it would be redeemed from oppression or enslavement, most notably in the last chapter of Machiavelli's *Prince* – the exhortation to snatch Italy and liberate it from the hands of the barbarians – which in turn had ended by quoting Petrarch's canzone "All'Italia" at just the point where it shifted from past and present to future: "Virtù contro a furore / Prenderà l'arme, e fia il combatter corto." Even those nineteenth-century political ideas that looked back to classical or Enlightenment models of civic virtue rather than to a Romantic conception of the people were turned towards the future. Cattaneo's democratic federalism, as Martin Thom has noted, drew on the idea of civic liberty to produce "a vision of the free city...in the promise of future confederation" (1995, 8). The liberalism of Cavour, Ricasoli and Sonnino rested on a confident belief in the future extension of the capitalist market and the rule of law as civilizing forces. The socialist movement, which expanded in Italy as elsewhere in Europe in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, was also decisively future-oriented, as were the various anarchist movements, and, after the First World War, the Communist Party. And so too, in different ways, were the Nationalist Association and Fascism.

Not all these future-oriented forms of thinking would conventionally be described as "utopian"; indeed, some of them, Fascism notably, had very little in common with the radical utopian tradition that ran from Thomas More and centred on community of goods. Classical Marxism, which did draw on this tradition, was nonetheless famously dismissive of "utopian socialism," as opposed to its own "scientific socialism," and Italian Marxists, including Labriola and Gramsci, nearly always used the terms "utopia" and "utopian" in a negative sense. Indeed, it was precisely against the dismissal of "utopias" by Marxists that anarchists and libertarian socialists, such as Francesco Saverio Merlino, defended their own visions of a collectivist utopia (1898). However, if we understand "utopia" in a general sense to mean any text that contains both a critique of existing political arrangements and a vision of better ones with which to replace them, then most of these political projects, including the Marxist ones, can be said to have had a strong utopian dimension.¹

Here one needs to set the record straight about Marxism and utopianism. The "utopian" character that Marx and Engels criticized in the writings of Saint-Simon, Fourier and Owen lay not in the fact that they imagined an ideal social and economic order in the future, since Marx and Engels themselves shared a similar imagined ideal, but in the proposed means of achieving it, namely rational persuasion directed at the bourgeoisie. When they wrote scathingly in the Communist Manifesto about the "utopian socialists" painting "fantastic pictures of a future society," "castles in the air," "duodecimo editions of the New Jerusalem," what they were ridiculing was their failure to understand the *means* required to reach this future, namely a revolution led by the proletariat that would overthrow capitalist relations of production in order to unleash the socialist potential present in the existing forces of production. Marx and Engels always recognized that the writings of the "utopians" contained important elements both in their conception of the future organization of society and in their critique of the present. "They attack every principle of existing society. Hence, they are full of the most valuable materials for the enlightenment of the working class."²

¹ For the generic meaning of utopia see Levitas (2007).

² Marx and Engels (1848, 110). Engels's pamphlet of 1880, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, restates the criticisms while recognizing the positive value of the work of Owen, Saint-Simon and Fourier. The opposition between "utopian" and "scientific" socialism introduced by Marx and Engels has long been called into question. See for example Stedman Jones (1981) and Geoghegan (1987). For "utopian" future projections in Marx's own writings see Badaloni (1978).

In the broad sense, utopian visions of the future were one of the most characteristic forms in which political thinking of both right and left in Italy was couched right up to the latter part of the twentieth century. Here I shall review some examples of this tradition and ask why, after having flourished in Italy for so long, they were virtually extinguished there in the last two decades of the twentieth century. In my concluding section I shall consider briefly whether future-oriented forms of political thinking may be re-emerging there, as elsewhere, in the twenty-first century.

From parallel to future worlds

More's *Utopia* (1516) had begun with an exposition of the injustices and iniquities in contemporary English society, including the enclosures of arable land and an irrational penal system, and then moved to an account of the fairer and more efficient arrangements on the island of Utopia. Few texts in the utopian tradition, including More's, conform to the later popular notion of a utopia as a pastoral idyll or heaven on earth. What they contain, generally, is on the one hand stringent social critique, sometimes of a satirical kind, and on the other a model of an alternative society where the ills of existing society are overcome. More's *Utopia* is a rather grim and puritanical place, where everyone who is capable of working must work, criminals are punished by being employed as slaves, extramarital liaisons are strictly forbidden and social control is exercised, in Stephen Greenblatt's words, "by the intense communal pressure of honor and blame" (1980, 48).

Fredric Jameson has observed that many utopian texts start, in this way, with a negative vision, an image of what is wrong with the existing world, before moving to the counterproposal of a better society. For this reason, he suggests, it is misleading to represent "positive" and "negative" utopias, or dystopias, as being simply opposed to one another. The dystopia is merely the utopia's "negative cousin," an elaboration of the negative vision that it already contains or implies (2005, 198).³ Dystopias may lack a positive counterproposal, but they often imply it either through its absence, as that which the dystopian society negates (for instance democracy or freedom of speech), or through the figure of the outsider, dissident or rebel organization that recurs in many dystopian texts, from Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (written 1920-21) to Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). The negative vision of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), which contains a dissident figure, John, was also explicitly counterposed by the liberal-democratic alternative that Huxley himself sketched out in the last two chapters of *Brave New World Revisited* (1958) and by the positive utopia he depicted in *Island*, his last book, published in 1962.

The vision of an alternative society in a utopian text can be presented in a number of different ways, depending on the type of text one is dealing with. It can be the account of an imaginary traveller, like Raphael Hythlodæus, the Portuguese sailor in More's text, who has visited Utopia and recounts what it is like, or it can be a series of principles and declarations of intent, as in the manifesto of a new political movement. Although constitutions and declarations of rights do not come strictly into the category of utopian texts they often embody similar aspirations and principles. Indeed, the drawing up of a modern constitution or bill of rights, like those of revolutionary America and France and the ones that followed them, is similar to the construction of a utopia since both are conceived as blueprints for a new political system which negates the injustices of the old. The Constitution of the Italian Republic, for all the compromises it contained between the proposals and demands of the different parties in the anti-fascist coalition, retains a distinct utopian dimension, not only in the Fundamental Principles (in particular Articles 3, 4, 5 and 11) but also in much of the First Part, starting with the section on Rights and Duties of the Citizen. These parts of the text involved not only a decisive negation of Fascism but also a vision of a more egalitarian, participatory and rights-based future society. The Constitution in this respect reflected an international trend towards the refounding of political institutions after the Second World War, to be discussed later in this essay.

Although all texts that one might designate as "utopian" in the broad-brush sense imply a future condition for humanity, utopias are not always located in the future. The

³ The book expands Jameson's important article of 2004.

intertwining of the vision of an alternative society and a setting in the future was a peculiar and distinctive feature of late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century utopian and dystopian texts. Earlier utopias rarely took the form of future projections. Most commonly they were imaginary voyages of discovery to other places existing in the same time or proposals of ideal communities in the present. This is true of most of the texts of this kind published in the three centuries from More's *Utopia* to Etienne Cabet's *Voyage en Icarie* (1840), including Montaigne's *Des Cannibales* (Chapter 30 of Book I of his *Essais*, 1580), Campanella's *La città del sole* (written 1602), Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1626), Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1772), Fourier's *Théorie des quatre mouvements* (1808) and Owen's *A New View of Society* (1813). Travel, exploration and the rise of ethnology and anthropology stimulated the awareness of a plurality of existing forms of government, economy and society and also gave rise to the modern idea of comparative politics. At the same time they reinforced the idea of possible parallel worlds existing simultaneously. Here utopian texts were characteristically imprecise about locations. Hythlodæus claims to have travelled with Amerigo Vespucci but he does not position Utopia precisely on a map. "You may wonder why no reference to Utopia appears in any geographical work," Peter Gilles writes in the prefatory letter to More's text, but he explains that "nowadays countries are always being discovered which were never mentioned in the old geography books" (2003, 13). Bensalem, the island of Bacon's *New Atlantis*, is in the Pacific at an indeterminate location west of Peru. Campanella's *City of the Sun* is on an island called Taprobana somewhere on the Equator. These narrative utopias of the early modern period coincide with the rise of European colonialism (Seeber 2009, 53). The settlement colonies established by Europeans in North and South America, South Africa and New Zealand involved attempts to realize new models of the polity and new forms of economic organization, in which the subjugation of the native populations and the unlimited exploitation of the earth's natural resources were part of the package. In this sense, "the whole process of colonial settlement can be seen as a type of utopianism" (Sargent 2010, 202).

The utopian fantasy set in a parallel present continued into the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁴ It was, however, at this time that the first wave of utopian texts projected into the future, whether positive or negative, appeared, even though they had an early precursor in Louis Sebastian Mercier's *L'An 2240* (1786) and a few mid nineteenth-century futuristic novels. Some, like Mercier's, specified in their titles the date of the imagined future society they depicted, others indicated it in the text. They included Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (1888), and William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1891), set in the late twentieth century (there is a reference in Chapter Two to a bridge on the Thames being "not very old...it was built or at least opened, in 1971" [15]),⁵ Maurice Spronck's *L'An 330 de la République* (i.e. 2122) (1894), Gabriel Tarde's *Fragments d'histoire future* (1896) (26th century, after a solar cooling that has produced a new ice age and the survivors have begun to reconstruct society underground); Camille Mauclair's *L'Orient vierge: roman épique de l'an 2000* (1898); H. G. Wells's *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899) (200 years in the future); Daniel Halévy's *Histoire de quatre ans: 1997-2001* (1903), Anatole France's *Sur la pierre blanche* (1904) (23rd century), Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1908) (events set 1900-2368) and E.M. Forster's *The Machine Stops* (1909) (unspecified future time).

The negative projections were themselves the product of a world where positive visions of the future had become normal and accepted, and in some cases they were designed as critical reactions to those visions, expressions of anxiety about the risks of

⁴ In Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871), partly intended as a satire on American democracy, a man finds down a mineshaft a path into an artificially lit subterranean world, which has a superior form of social and political life. There are also Paul Adam's *Lettres de Malaisie* (1898; reedition 1910 with title *La Cité prochaine*) and Jean Grave's anarchist utopia *Terre libre (Les pionniers)* (1908), where a group of transported convicts survive a shipwreck and form an ideal new community on a desert island. The island as setting for economic or social experiments had precedents, of course, not only in *Utopia* and *New Atlantis* but also in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which Marx brilliantly deconstructed, in the "Introduction" to the *Grundrisse* (1857-1858), as a projection back into an imaginary primordial state of the entrepreneurial individual who was actually a product a bourgeois philosophy and economic relations. It would recur, in dystopian form, in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954).

⁵ Morris's is an interesting variant on future-projected utopias because England has gone forwards into a predominantly rural society based on handicrafts, with London re-ruralized and looking like a cluster of villages interspersed with forests and agricultural land.

centralized state power or technocracy. In other words, they were the critical counterpart of the increasing orientation of industrialized societies towards the future, as they attempted to harness not only science and technology but also planning and social-scientific methodologies to shape their own ideas of what they would like to become. *Brave New World*, set in 2540, was conceived both in response to actual technocratic tendencies in the present and as a rejoinder to H.G. Wells's *Men Like Gods* (1923) with its vision of benign world government and beneficent science.

Italy's Machine Age

Italian intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century thus had behind them a long tradition of European utopian thought as well as a more recent tradition of future-oriented utopianism. They were also operating in an international context where future-oriented political plans had become normal and where positive visions of the future were expressed across the political spectrum from right to left. Paolo Mantegazza's *L'anno 3000*, published in 1897, is hard to position exactly on this spectrum. On the one hand it imagines a future where wars have been abolished and where there is a world federal system, the United Planetary States, with its capital in Andropolis, formerly Darjeeling. This system replicates the human body's circulatory and nervous systems, thereby ensuring a political culture in harmony with nature. The political cells are communes or municipalities, connected to the centre (heart and brain) at Andropolis by regions, the system's blood vessels and ganglia (1897, 123).⁶ One of the regions is the United States of Europe, with its capital in Rome. On the other hand, Mantegazza's vision of global political harmony rests on a social and economic order in which the capitalist market operates free from all fiscal and tariff restraints, where a class structure remains firmly in place (even though there is now a progressive income tax from which the poor are exempt), where women are denied the educational opportunities open to men, and where there are eugenic laws that require couples to be tested before being allowed to marry, the number of children each couple may have is limited and babies born with an impairment ("i neonati patologici") are killed (ibid., 131).

Like many utopias, Mantegazza's future vision is designed not only as a model of ideal governance but also a critique of what its author saw as the ills and follies of the present. It lambastes parliamentarism, whose two-chamber system and right of royal veto hampers efficient government, as well as socialism and egalitarianism. Ceylon in 3000 has been turned into an "Island of Experiments" where alternative political systems, including tyranny, may be tried out on a small scale. In the experimental egalitarian state in Ceylon the inhabitants, male or female, are almost indistinguishable from each other and their faces and movements betray "una noia immensa." The socialist state there has a capital called Turatia, "in onore di un certo Turati, che visse in Italia verso la fine del secolo XIX" (ibid., 43). Here the abolition of marriage means that children no longer know who their father is, since women have many lovers, and they become children of the state. The abolition of private property has drained citizens' motivation to work, since they may accumulate nothing to leave to their children, and apathy prevails. At the core of Mantegazza's imagined new federal world order, governed from Andropolis, is a technical regulation of society by central ministries. The work of the planetary parliament, whose members are elected by universal suffrage from the regions, is limited to one month a year, just enough to frame the essential legislation. In the remaining period the executive functions are performed by the ministries whose experts manage respectively agriculture, industry and commerce, education, health and recreation. Overall, parts of Mantegazza's vision anticipate the idea of a federal Europe, expressed by W.T. Stead and others shortly afterwards, not to mention various twentieth-century aspirations to a conflict-free world order, whereas other parts point towards a limitation of the powers of parliament, anti-socialism, anti-egalitarianism and they envisage a future capitalist society managed by technical corporations (Stead 1899).

One of the early twentieth-century versions of the right strand of futuristic thinking in Italy was Mario Morasso's *L'imperialismo nel secolo XX* published in 1903.

⁶ I am grateful to Nicoletta Pireddu for drawing my attention to this text and its importance in this tradition. See her excellent introduction to the edition of the English translation (2010).

Even as he dismissed the radical utopias of the century that had just ended Morasso envisaged a future consistent with the age of machines in which “new and terrible currents of energy” would be unleashed.

Il secolo decimonono fu il secolo della utopia democratico-umanitaria, il secolo ventesimo sarà il secolo della forza e della conquista.

Guai a quelli che non saranno forti; individui, classi sociali e popoli saranno travolti irresistibilmente sotto il dispiegarsi delle nuove e terribili correnti di energia, che si contenderanno il dominio della vita e del mondo. (1903, 32)

Morasso's despised past was that of liberal and democratic politics. His desired future centred on industrial-military development and war. Strength, according to his vision of struggle for domination, is embodied not only in individuals and powerful elites but in machines and the hegemony of urban over rural society. These arguments were further elaborated in his next book, *La nuova arma (la macchina)* (1905), one of the ur-texts of Futurism. Democracy, Morasso argues, has fatally dissipated the energies unleashed by urban modernity and the machine age, because it has offered all members of society equal rights and the equal obligation to work, rather than concentrating rights and work unequally. The many have therefore been chasing few benefits: wealth, domination, pleasure (ibid., 13). Instead, an elite should be able to live off the labour of others. Morasso's vision of the future here was, as Marinetti's would be four years later, explicitly gendered. It involved an aggressive rejection of academies and museums, seen as enclosing storehouses of tradition and the past, and a leap forward into a male sodality where women, like territories, are to be conquered:

al fuoco il libro, noi vogliamo sottrarci al suo giogo arcaico, vogliamo essere noi, vogliamo uscire dai musei, dalle accademie, da tutti i luoghi rinchiusi, bui e silenziosi, da tutti i depositi di anticaglie e muffa, da tutti i recinti del passato, e col tramite più veloce, più veemente, sia l'automobile, sia il tram elettrico, vogliamo correre fra i nostri compagni che lavorano e che amano, vogliamo correre là dove si opera, dove si lotta, dove si crea, dove si vive, oppure dove nell'occhio della donna desiderata o sulla vetta agognata si contempla una infinita conquista! (Ibid., 158)

Some of the future visions of the right were partly dressed in political clothing taken from the left. Enrico Corradini and other nationalists took from socialism and syndicalism the idea of a class-conscious proletariat and displaced it onto a militaristic nationalist and imperialist future.⁷ The “proletarian nation,” by going to war against other nations, would acquire colonial living space and Italy would become steeled for future growth. Looking back at the wars of unification Corradini said in 1911:

Io voglio dirvi, o signori, che senza la guerra noi non saremmo.

Né saremo mai quali i nostri padri ci vedevano con gli occhi della speranza, quando versavano il loro sangue.

Avremo mal corrisposto alla loro speranza e tradito il nostro dovere. Il dovere che anche noi abbiamo di preparare in una Patria migliore una vita migliore a coloro che debbono nascere del nostro sangue.

E di concorrere, agendo e patendo, alla conservazione e all'espansione dell'attiva e produttiva civiltà del mondo. (1911, 191-192)

These future-projected ideas were to be echoed in the first Fascist programme of 1919, even though the latter deliberately avoided drawing up any specific political arrangements for the future: “Noi poniamo la valorizzazione della guerra rivoluzionaria

⁷ The syndicalist origins of the Associazione Nazionalista Italiana are discussed by De Grand (1978).

al di sopra di tutto e di tutti. Gli altri problemi: burocrazia, amministrativi, giuridici, scolastici, coloniali ecc. li tratteremo quando avremo creato la classe dirigente.” The 1921 programme of the Partito Nazionale Fascista, by contrast, was clear and detailed about how Italy’s future state and society were to be organized. It promised to limit the powers of Parliament and strengthen those of the executive, it envisaged the formation of syndicates and corporations and it argued, against socialist internationalism, that nations were the dominant forms of social organization and competition between them was an essential law of living in the world. It consequently rejected the newly-created League of Nations and looked forward to Italy’s future colonial expansion. It was also specific about educational policy, essential for ensuring the reproduction of a ruling class and for inculcating military and nationalist values, the teaching of which was to be made compulsory in elementary schools.⁸ All these principles were to be realized in practice in the Fascist regime, many of whose public projects could be seen as concrete attempts to give material form to a political utopia, from the creation of its model new towns and districts, such as Predappio, Littoria, Case INCIS in Addis Ababa or E42 in Rome, to the organization of the nation’s youth into phalanxes of young guards, the Figli della Lupa, Balilla, Piccole Italiane and Avanguardie. It was projects such as these, along with their counterparts in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union that would give substance to the dystopian visions of Huxley, Orwell and others.

Against these currents on the right, activists and intellectuals on the left in Italy had from the early years of the twentieth century envisaged an alternative development of industrial society that would emancipate the class of worker-producers instead of shackling them to a capitalist future. The most distinctive projections were those that imagined new forms of social organization based on cooperation at the grass roots between small units of producers, both in their syndicalist versions and in the factory councils movement theorized by the Ordine Nuovo group of Gramsci, Tasca and Terracini. These movements, although they were defeated – the occupation of the factories in 1920 failed and was succeeded by the rise of Fascism –, were among the most original in Europe in elaborating the idea of council communism. Ten years later Gramsci would reflect from prison on their historic importance in establishing the principle that new forms of industrial and social organization could be developed by the workers themselves directly in the factory (1975, III, 2156). In fact, there was a direct filiation between the factory council experience and Gramsci’s reflections in the early 1930s on Americanism and Fordism. More than any other parts of the prison writings the latter have a utopian character, since they take the form simultaneously of a critique of capitalist rationalization, which serves merely to subjugate the workers more effectively to a regime of high productivity and limited redistribution of private profit, and a vision of potential communist liberation, the creation of “a new type of worker and man,” by means of these same forms of advanced industrial organization.

In America la razionalizzazione del lavoro e il proibizionismo sono indubbiamente connessi: le inchieste degli industriali sulla vita intima degli operai, i servizi di ispezione creati da alcune aziende per controllare la ‘moralità’ degli operai sono necessità del nuovo metodo di lavoro. Chi irridesse a queste iniziative (anche se andate fallite) e vedesse in esse solo una manifestazione ipocrita di ‘puritanismo,’ si [sic] negherebbe ogni possibilità di capire l’importanza, il significato e la *portata obbiettiva* del fenomeno americano, che è *anche* il maggior sforzo collettivo verificatosi finora per creare con rapidità inaudita e con una coscienza del fine mai vista nella storia, un tipo nuovo di lavoratore e di uomo. (Ibid., 2164, italics in original text)⁹

In the link that Gramsci makes between sexual restraint or sublimation and the enhanced productive capacity of the worker one can see the influence both of

⁸ The 1919 programme of the *Fasci di combattimento* is reproduced in the appendix to De Felice (1965), and the 1921 programme of the PNF in the appendix to De Felice (1966).

⁹ Franco De Felice has perceptively discussed Gramsci’s interest in a ‘rovesciamento socialista’ of Fordism and the links between it and Lenin’s interest in Taylorism and the recruitment of American advisors to Soviet industry in the 1920s (1978, xxx). These aspects of Gramsci’s notes on Fordism are omitted from Harry Braverman’s otherwise perceptive account (1974).

contemporary discussions of the new Soviet morality and of the earlier utopian tradition, as he himself recognized: “È da rilevare come nelle ‘utopie’ la questione sessuale abbia larghissima parte, spesso prevalente” (ibid., 2147). Some later readers of Gramsci have found these passages problematic, particularly if one sets them against contemporary arguments linking sexual restraint negatively to political repression, such as those of Wilhelm Reich or the surrealists. Gramsci by contrast celebrates the conjugal monogamy of the implicitly male industrial worker and criticizes the bohemian sexuality, abuse of alcohol and high divorce rate of the American upper classes: “l’operaio che va al lavoro dopo una notte di ‘stravizio’ non è un buon lavoratore, l’esaltazione passionale non può andare d’accordo coi movimenti cronometrati dei gesti produttivi legati ai più perfetti automatismi” (ibid., 2167).

Mid-century utopias

In the middle of the twentieth century there was a bifurcation in relation to utopian thought. On the one hand, between 1940 and the early 1960s the experience of single-party regimes, the mass destruction of cities and the potential for global nuclear annihilation, the revelations of the Nazi genocide, and the Soviet purges and labour camps, produced a deep scepticism about the possibility of constructing a better political future according to a plan. In June 1947 Karl Popper gave his address on “Utopia and violence” at the Institut des Arts in Brussels (1948). Since one cannot know in advance the future outcome of a political action, Popper argued, it is false to believe that the ends of political change can be determined scientifically. Utopianism will lead invariably to violence, he claimed, because “differences of opinion concerning what the ideal state should be like cannot always be smoothed out by the method of argument.” “Utopian rationalism is a self-defeating rationalism. However benevolent its ends it does not bring happiness, but only the familiar misery of being condemned to live under a tyrannical government” (1948, 359-360). Much of the writing on totalitarianism after Popper, with the notable exception of Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), suggested similarly that totalitarian government was a *necessary* outcome of attempts to plan a political future or an economy rationally. Examples were J. L. Talmon’s *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1952), which traced modern totalitarianism back to its alleged embryo in Rousseau’s *Social Contract* (1762), and Friedrich and Brzezinski’s *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (1965). Judith Shklar, in *After Utopia*, published in 1957, wrote: “the urge to construct grand designs for the political future of mankind is gone. The last vestiges of utopian faith required for such an enterprise have vanished.” She continued:

In the age of two world wars, totalitarian dictatorship, and mass murder this faith can be regarded only as simple-minded, or even worse, as a contemptible form of complacency. But more has happened than just a decline of optimism. Rather than look to the future at all, we tend to turn backward and ask ourselves how and why European civilization has reached its present deplorable condition. (vii)

On the other hand, however, the same experiences of total war between nations and of totalitarian rule led to the framing of principles for more just and equitable forms of political organization that could arise out of the ashes as well as of new forms of law. The most significant examples were the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1948, the recasting of international law through the Nuremberg Trials and the establishment of the International Court of Justice in The Hague, and the blueprints for a federal Europe that began to be put together during and after the war. The return to a utopian impulse after the Second World War reflected a collective sense of the need for refounding similar to that which Lewis Mumford had identified after the First World War: “it is only after the storm that we dare to look for the rainbow. Our fall into a chasm of disillusion has stimulated us to discuss in a more thorough way the ultimate goods, the basic aims, the

whole conception of the “good life” by which, in modern times, we have been guided” (1923, 12).

On balance, Italians contributed more to the trend of forward-looking political reconstruction than to that of scepticism about any form of rationally planned future. Of the two European Axis powers Italy had suffered the far less crushing defeat, thanks to its having disengaged from the war in 1943, and from its politically varied anti-fascist movement there had arisen diverse plans and visions of how to constitute the new political order. Among the latter was Spinelli and Rossi’s *Per un’Europa libera e unita* (1943) containing the text known as the *Ventotene Manifesto*, originally written in 1941, which was, along with the writings of Jean Monnet, one of the founding texts of the new European federalism, and the clearest of all statements of the position that, if future European wars were to be avoided, Europe needed to be united as a political entity. Spinelli and Rossi, critical of the Soviet model of socialism, were mindful of the risks of “utopian” planning. They wrote, for instance:

La statizzazione generale dell’economia è stata la prima forma utopistica in cui le classi operaie si sono rappresentate la loro liberazione dal giogo capitalista, ma, una volta realizzata a pieno, non porta allo scopo sognato, bensì alla costituzione di un regime in cui tutta la popolazione è asservita alla ristretta classe dei burocrati gestori dell’economia, come è avvenuto in Russia. (Ibid.)

And yet, as a text, the *Ventotene Manifesto* itself has an explicitly utopian form. It starts with a critical analysis of the past and present, called “La crisi della civiltà moderna,” before moving on to two forward-looking sections both headed “I compiti del dopoguerra,” the first on European unity, the second on the reform of society.

There were also the writings in 1945-46 of Piero Calamandrei, which set out the principles of a new legality, in which social justice, including the right to work, would be legally guaranteed alongside individual rights and freedoms: “I ‘diritti dell’uomo e del cittadino’ diventeranno, nella nuova legalità che l’avvenire si appresta a ricostruire, i ‘diritti del lavoratore’” (1944, 11). This principle, which brought together elements both of the socialist tradition and of Catholic social and economic theory, was embodied in Article 1 of the Constitution of the Italian Republic, approved in December 1947, to which both Calamandrei and Amintore Fanfani contributed. Calamandrei also recognized, importantly, that the Nuremberg trials had introduced a new legal concept, that of crimes against humanity, which could override the defence that the Nazis were obeying the policies of their nation-state (1946). Even Benedetto Croce, who after 1945 was staunchly anti-communist as well as aware of the destruction of freedom carried out by the Fascist and Nazi regimes, reasserted in 1947 his view that history was the history of liberty against those who saw in it merely a succession of despotisms and enslavements. In history “il pensiero direttivo è...sempre il bene, a cui il male finisce per servire da stimolo. L’opera è della libertà che sempre si sforza di ristabilire, e sempre ristabilisce, le condizioni sociali e politiche di una più intensa libertà” (49-50).

The text that took the most classically utopian form in this period, however, was Adriano Olivetti’s *L’ordine politico delle Comunità*, published in 1945. The philanthropic industrialist from Ivrea, who proselytized his ideas with a zeal similar to Robert Owen’s in his proposals for New Lanark in the early nineteenth century, presented the need for a refounding of society as fundamentally spiritual:

Prima che i popoli dimentichino i crimini, i massacri, le rovine, la desolazione, chi è chiamato a stabilire il nuovo edificio sociale bene si accerti che la metafisica razzista non fu che ODIO, MENZOGNA, AVIDITÀ. Soggiacendo ad essa, intere collettività caddero nell’errore e nel peccato ed ebbero inaridito il cuore. Ora sia ben chiaro che solo lo spirito cristiano nei vinti e nei vincitori, lo spirito che è AMORE, VERITÀ, CARITÀ, potrà riscattare quei popoli e che esso soltanto potrà diventare la forza animatrice di una più umana civiltà. (Olivetti 1945, 18)

The Community was, in Olivetti's conception, the basic unit of a federal polity and at the same time the "human diaphragm" between the individual and the state. It was to be an intermediate administrative unit between the municipality (Comune) and the Region. It would be small enough (c. 70,000-100,000 people) for its elected representatives to be directly accountable to their electorate, whereas the Region and the national state were both too large and distant. Olivetti's model was directly opposed to the Futurist and Fascist cult of the city and nation ("Le grandi città moderne...sono ormai impotenti a conferire un'armonia di vita, un tempo spontanea" [ibid. 7]) as well as to the idea of national exclusivity. Writing at a time where there were thousands of refugees and displaced persons in Europe, and before the UN Convention on Refugees (1951), he proposed:

La cittadinanza potrà essere conferita a tutti gli stranieri, senza distinzione dello Stato da cui provengono, in virtù di una decisione di quella Comunità ove, per un determinato periodo, lo straniero avrà stabilito la sua residenza. Gli elementi di decisione saranno esclusivamente quelli morali. (Ibid., 16)

Olivetti's Community-based Italy was envisaged, thus, as a new moral order, centred on Christian and socialist principles, and not just a new political system. Its supreme law would be the Gospel and the family would be a place not of paternal authority and subjugation, still less of domestic violence, intimidation and fear, but "il primo ed eminente esempio di esistenza e possibilità...di una società socialista-comunista e cristiana." Among other things, in this model family the child with disability ("il figlio minorato") will receive the same attention and treatment as the non-disabled one ("quello sano") e "tutti cooperano, in misura della loro capacità e moralità, al bene comune" (ibid.).

From Liberationism to the Death of Utopias

Grand blueprints for the future such as Olivetti's, which were already critically dismissed at the time as naïve pipe dreams both by his fellow industrialists and by the parties of the left, did not survive far into the postwar world. However, there was one last distinct phase of future-oriented political thought before the end of the century: in the 1960s and early 1970s when in Italy, as in several other countries, multiple scenarios of human liberation were imagined. On the left there was a conscious return to the idea of radical change starting from below, from the revolutionary cell or nucleus, against the practice of gradual reforms from above led by party elites. This idea, which looked back to Marx's writings on the Paris Commune and to subsequent theorizations of council communism, including the Italian strand associated with the early Gramsci, also looked to the future to imagine new practices of political organization and it was to be developed by the collectives of the women's movement after 1970. One of the most notable features of the protest cycles that lasted from 1967 to the late 1970s was the extension of scenarios of future liberation to a wider range of issues and human subjects than ever before. In addition to the women's movement and gay liberation there was a new attention to "marginalized" people (*emarginati*) – patients in mental hospitals, people with disabilities, prisoners, the unemployed, old people – no longer as objects of policy but as active social subjects. The movements of the 1960s and 1970s made permanent gains in winning recognition of the rights of these social subjects, as well as changes to their conditions of life. Permanent, if limited, gains were also made by the organized labour movement, by lesbians and straight women and by gay men and bisexuals. However, as the protest cycles came to an end so too did future-oriented political thought. For the remainder of the century when people imagined political change in Italy they no longer imagined grand scenarios of radical transformation. They thought, rather, in terms of piecemeal reforms, adjustments to the system rather than an overturning of the system itself.

This retrenchment had multiple causes. The first four causes operated at the level of the economy and the political system, the fifth at the level of social and political

theory. The first was the absorption and neutralization of protest by reform. The gains of the workers' movement – the *Comitati Unitari di Base* (autonomous factory-based committees, which drew on council communism) in 1969, the *Statuto dei Lavoratori* in 1970, the 150 Hours (1973), which gave workers the entitlement to 150 hours of education on a three-year cycle on company time, the strengthened provisions of the *Cassa Integrazione* (1975) – were substantial, but in satisfying its most immediate demands they also created a new *modus vivendi* between workers and employers. The same applied to the gains in other areas, such as the liberalization of the *piani di studio* in the universities (1969) and the mental health reforms embodied in *Legge 180* (1978), inspired by the actions and ideas of radical psychiatrists such as Franco Basaglia and Agostino Pirella, which led eventually to the closure of all long-stay psychiatric institutions, with the exception of psychiatric prisons (*ospedali psichiatrici giudiziari*). The second cause was the set of structural changes in the economy that took place between the 1970s and mid 1980s: the shift from mass production in large plants like Mirafiori to decentralized and flexibilized production, the relocation of parts of the assembly cycle of major industrial complexes in the south, the expansion of small and medium-sized firms in the Centre and North-East. All these changes, together with rising unemployment, weakened the bargaining power of the labour unions in the traditional heartlands of Italian industry. The third cause was the spiral of violence and the strategy of tension. The idea of violence as a way of effecting a breakthrough to the future had been present since the late 1960s in the revolutionary left, which had looked both to contemporary anti-imperialist liberation struggles in South Asia, Africa and Latin America and to the unfinished business of the Resistance in Italy. As a leaflet of the Brigate Rosse had put it in April 1972, “abbiamo consegnato il fucile e da quel momento ci hanno sparato addosso! Quanti morti nelle piazze dal '45? Quale il nostro potere oggi?” (“Il voto non paga,” 388). However, this conception of revolutionary violence had been quickly countered and masked by state violence and that of the far right and ultimately, with the actions that culminated in the killing of Aldo Moro, the idea itself became widely discredited across the left. The spiral of violence also provided a pretext for the emergency laws and the arrest of far left activists. The fourth cause was the changed balance of political power, after the decisive realignment of the Partito Comunista Italiano during the 1970s towards more pro-system positions – economic austerity and “national solidarity” – and the new alliance between the Democrazia Cristiana and the Socialists which laid the basis for Craxi's hegemony in the 1980s. The system adjusted itself to a cross-party management of capitalism from which all genuine left alternatives were excluded.

The fifth cause, which took place at the level of social and political theory, involved a decisive turn away from predictive models and future-oriented modes of thinking. As Guido Crainz retrospectively summed up the new mood: “vi è un più radicale mutare del rapporto fra presente e passato: la fiducia nel futuro e il baldanzoso rifiuto di un passato prossimo arretrato e buio hanno ormai lasciato il posto a spaesamenti diffusi, a paure sia del presente che del futuro” (2003, 558-559). An early symptom of this was the collection of essays edited by Aldo Gargani in 1979 with the title *La crisi della ragione*, which recognized the crisis of the Enlightenment model of reason, and of rational progress as the basis for social organization. Remo Bodei wrote in that collection about a “crisis of rationality” consisting of the inability to solve a whole set of contemporary problems from hunger to the risk of exhaustion of energy resources to inflation and population growth. These problems generated the fear of “altri conflitti, che spargono la paura di un ‘medioevo prossimo venturo,’ l'antiutopia di un '1984' o l'immagine di una nuova conflagrazione mondiale, diffondono la convinzione di essere in balia dell'ignoto e favoriscono, in funzione difensiva, il ritorno a pratiche ‘oscurantistiche’” (1979, 233). However, many of the contributors to Gargani's volume sought to reconstitute various forms of reason. The proponents of *pensiero debole* took a more radical view, undermining the notion of metaphysical foundations and attacking ‘strong’ ideas of reason. In the introduction to their edited collection of 1983 Rovatti and Vattimo talked of the need to negate the “tratti metafisici del pensiero, prima fra tutti la ‘forza’ che esso ha sempre creduto di doversi attribuire in nome del suo accesso privilegiato all'essere come fondamento” (10). They shared the tendency of other philosophers of the postmodern, like Jean-François Lyotard, to reject historical grand narratives and to see history as splintered into micronarratives. Rovatti wrote “Che le storie si moltiplichino, che cioè siano “molte” storie: ecco il primo rilievo.... La “molteplicità” può divenire la categoria di un nuovo pensiero, di un pensiero ‘debole’?”

(1983, 47). Vattimo put forward a similar argument in *La società trasparente*, writing that postmodernity came into existence when the belief that being modern, being in the here and now, ceased to have an unquestionably positive value and the idea of there being a single course of History was undermined by a recognition of the multiplicity of criss-crossing histories (1989). The conception of such a late modern or postmodern present certainly did not exclude the possibility of change – on the contrary Vattimo wrote that late modernity is “il luogo in cui, forse, si annuncia una diversa possibilità di esistenza per l’uomo” (1985, 19) – but what it did renounce was the possibility of planning a single rational future for humanity.

Since this turn in the late 1970s social theory and philosophy in Italy have not returned to future-oriented modes of thinking and this has had an impact also on ways of conceiving politics. Their attention has been turned rather, to a critical diagnosis of modernity and of the present, and the outlook could be described as one of critical pessimism. One can consider here Giorgio Agamben’s writings about biopolitics, the state of exception and the degenerations of contemporary democracy, or Adriano Cavarero’s recent work on the recipients of violence (Agamben 1995, 2003; Cavarero 2007). In both cases, the approach to politics is not about projecting future scenarios but about understanding the relation of political power in the recent past and the here and now to the idea of the human. In her discussion with Judith Butler, originally published in *Micromega* 4, 2005, Cavarero argues that it is useful to define the human not so much, as Aristotle did, against the non-human (i.e. animals) but against the in-human, which is the capacity within humans to lose or surrender their humanity. This is a way of thinking about what it means to be human that she explicitly traces back to the Nazi genocide: “L’inumano...allude a una negazione dell’umano che è interna all’umano stesso. La barbarie di Auschwitz potrebbe essere un esempio. Sembra, insomma, che l’epoca storica apra una riflessione sull’umano che non può non confrontarsi con l’abisso della sua autonegazione.” She takes the “scene of torture” as an exemplary case: “l’inumano rischia di apparire qui, in ultima analisi, come ciò che il torturatore e il torturato condividono: più che un attributo, il tratto comune, l’ultimo residuo, della loro perdita – o negata, mortificata – umanità” (Butler and Cavarero 2009, 121 and 124). The work of these philosophers of contemporary political negativity, of course, is not purely negative, and each of them imagines or at least implies alternative ways in which humanity and community may be thought in relation to contemporary biopower. This is true also of Roberto Esposito, whose work engages in a critical dialogue with Agamben’s and argues that an affirmative version of biopolitical power, *biopotenza* rather than *biopolitica*, can be mapped as well as the negative one associated with the Holocaust and the diffusion of the state of exception (2004). Yet none of them couches these alternatives as projections of a better future or as narratives of an alternative world in accordance with a utopian model.¹⁰

The influential writings of the post-workerists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, as well as of Paolo Virno and Maurizio Lazzarato, also fit into this trend of a turn away from the model of the future-projected political scenario. The globalized system that Hardt and Negri named ‘Empire’ and described at the turn of the millennium itself involves a denial of the future. Its apologists and ideologues portray it as an unchangeable system, a settled global world order that marks the end of change and thus of history. To be sure, Hardt and Negri do not accept this and they argue that Empire is a historical moment like others and can be superseded. However, what they claim will supersede it will not be its revolutionary negation in some future time but rather its undermining from within by forces of resistance that are already active in the present. In other words, their critique of Empire does not take the form of a blueprint of a new society projected into the future, along the lines of the 1960s movements or of the utopian model generally, but a critique of the present in which Empire is hegemonic. It is true that some of their writing about ‘counter-Empire’ sounds future-oriented, for instance when they write “We need a force capable of not only organizing the destructive capacities of the multitude, but also constituting through the desires of the multitude an alternative. The counter-Empire must also be a new global vision, a new way of living in the world” (2000, 214). Yet they make clear that this new way of living is *already present* within Empire, for instance in transnational migratory flows, transgressions of fixed sexual and gender boundaries and in “new and increasingly

¹⁰ [Editors’ note: see Manuel Rota’s essay, “No Future For You: Italy Between Fictional Past And Postnational Future,” and Roberto Esposito’s essay, “Fortuna e politica all’origine della filosofia italiana” in this volume.]

immaterial forms of affective and intellectual labour power,” all of which add up to a diffused resistance to Empire within Empire itself, a “struggling within and constructing against Empire, on its hybrid, modulating terrains” (ibid., 217, 218).

Back to the Future?

It is always more difficult to diagnose the present than analyse the past. However, if future-oriented thought went into crisis into Italy from the late 1970s, there are some signs that it is beginning to return in the present. I am not referring here, needless to say, to sloganistic references to the future, like the title of Gianfranco Fini’s party, Futuro e Libertà, founded in February 2011, but rather to the impact in Italy of deeper international trends. There has been a positive utopian dimension, for instance, in the no-global and anti-capitalist movements associated with the World Social Forum, first held at Porto Alegre in Brazil in January 2001, which have many adherents in Italy, as was clearly evidenced in the protests at the G8 Summit in Genoa in July of that year. There are, for instance, movements that argue for alternative models of sustainable economic growth and political organization centred neither on nation-states nor on suprastate entities like the European Union. Programmes are also emerging internationally for radical alternatives to a global capitalist system in disarray after the late 2000s financial crisis, including ideas of reconstituting communism on a new post-Marxist theoretical basis, as advocated by Slavoj Žižek and others, and these have begun to have echoes in Italy too. There are also various strands in feminist thought that have never relinquished a utopian dimension.¹¹ The 2010s look set to be an epoch of global activism and protests, starting with the unprecedented mobilizations of young people all over Europe – including Italy – in 2010 against education cuts, restructuring, privatization and fee increases and continuing with the extraordinary wave of revolts across North Africa and the Middle East in the spring of 2011, the Occupy Wall Street action starting on September 17 and the Occupy the World demonstrations on October 15, with the largest turnout in Rome. The attention of the world’s media and of Italy’s ruling parties focused predictably on the black bloc violence in the Rome demonstration – smashing of storefront windows, burning of parked cars – but this was, as in the Genoa demonstrations in July 2001, essentially a sideshow, almost certainly infiltrated by agents provocateurs, and had nothing to do with the underlying motives of the mass mobilization.

The idea of planning future alternatives and projecting better political futures may thus be coming back onto the agenda, in Italy too, after that period of deep anti-utopian retrenchment that lasted from the late 1970s until the end of the twentieth century. The day after the October 15 demonstration in Rome, Eugenio Scalfari wrote a leader in *La Repubblica* sympathising with the grievances of the non-violent demonstrators but saying that their aims were utopian, a term he intended in a negative sense, evoking in his article the memory not only of Marx and Engels’s strictures against utopian socialism but also the “folle volo” of Dante’s Ulysses and his companions:

Sono d’accordo con loro anche perché a me e a quelli della mia generazione è stato rubato il presente e la memoria del passato e vi assicuro che non si tratta d’un furto da poco. Ma so che non è con l’utopia che si risolve il problema. L’utopia è una fuga in avanti alla quale subentra ben presto l’indifferenza. Il vostro entusiasmo è sacrosanto come la vostra pacifica ribellione, ma dovete utilizzarlo per la progettazione concreta del futuro, altrimenti da indignati finirete in rottamatori e quando tutto sarà stato rottamato – il malfatto insieme al benfatto – sarete diventati ‘vecchi e tardi’ come i compagni di Ulisse quando varcarono le Colonne d’Ercole e subito dopo naufragarono. (2011, 3)

¹¹ Žižek and Costas (2010); Johns (2010). The work of Seyla Benhabib is particularly important in the tradition of feminist work on utopianism (1986; 1992).

Yet, *pace* Scalfari, utopian projects always start with a negative recognition of concrete inadequacies in the present and they then galvanize adherents around a vision of an alternative. As the motto of the World Social Forum puts it: “another world is possible.” In Italy now there are very concrete reasons behind the protests: a discredited and malfunctioning system of global finance; an economic downturn worse even than that of the 1920s; a deep crisis of the Italian economy, mismanaged by a corrupt, self-serving ruling class; the failure of the institutional left for over a decade to propose an effective political alternative; the highest rate of graduate unemployment in Europe and the seeming impossibility for many of the generation born around 1990 of finding a job, having their own home or being able to maintain children. The fact that these people have not yet worked out a “concrete project for the future” is not the most important point about their movement. What matters is that they have begun to envision an alternative political future. The project can grow from that.

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