

## The conversion to The Coming Insurrection. A contribution to a foucauldian history of revolutionary subjectivity

di Mario Bosincu

*“Every act of rebellion expresses a nostalgia for innocence and an appeal to the essence of being.”<sup>1</sup>*  
Albert Camus

As it is well known, Eric Voegelin speaks of modernity as being characterised by the reemergence of Gnosticism to such an extent that Irenaeus’s treatise *Adversus Haereses* should be «consulted with profit by the student who wants to understand modern political ideas and movements»<sup>2</sup>. However questionable and reductionistic Voegelin’s genealogical project may be, it is thanks to it that the issue of the «Gnostic trajectory in modern discourses»<sup>3</sup> has been raised. In the present paper on the French anarchist manifesto *The Coming Insurrection* (2007) I will refer to the gnostic world of ideas, so to speak, as a refraction surface for some aspects of the modern revolutionary strain of thought. At the same time, I will link these gnostic-revolutionary tenets to some key themes of Romantic anti-capitalism as well as to the Cynic tradition of the *parrhesia* [free-spokenness]. To begin with, it is worth noting that the ancient gnostics understood their sapiential lore – their *gnosis* – as the key to understanding the true nature of the cosmos and its revelation as the outcome of a catastrophe which had perverted its original state of perfection into one of utter corruption and had originated a universe created by a malicious demiurge and ruled by demonic powers, the so-called ‘archonts’. Hence the «gnostic acosmism»<sup>4</sup>, that took the form of a critical attitude towards the whole order of being viewed as a vast dark prison. As Oswald Spengler remarked with reference to the «cavern feeling»<sup>5</sup> of prophetic religions, their underlying dualism found expression in the conception of the world as a *cave* where the dominant darkness battled against the light piercing through it. In this respect, the anonymous authors of *The Coming Insurrection* give expression to a similar world-feeling because they trace the degeneration of society into a state of imperfection, namely into the form of a commodified «metropolitan desert»<sup>6</sup>, back to the triumph of instrumental rationality against which they rebel. The ensuing reduction of the world to a set of manipulable objects has as its consequence that the modern metropolis, unlike the cities of the past ages, disseminates itself everywhere establishing the grip of the market on the whole social life: «Everywhere it’s the same chilling void»<sup>7</sup>, the «empty, frozen space, where nothing moves apart from registered bodies, molecular automobiles, and ideal commodities»<sup>8</sup>. These feelings of dread and of forlornness as the soul’s response to its being-in-the-world of late capitalism are closely related to the Romantic leitmotiv of the demonization of the thoroughly rationalized dimension of modern cities. A description of the rationalized city dimension was provided by Oswald Spengler. In *The Decline of the West* (1918-1922) the German philosopher pictures the

Cosmopolis standing «at the end of the life's course of every great Culture»<sup>9</sup> as the place where the «monetary thought»<sup>10</sup> and its underlying calculative rationality celebrated their triumph. Spengler's work also sheds light on another Romantic anticapitalist motif which is to be found in *The Coming Insurrection*: the idea that metropolises are artificial spaces, cut off from natural rhythms, so that, in Spengler's words, «the immemorially old roots of Being are dried up in the stone-masses of its cities»<sup>11</sup>. Thus emerges the Romantic theme of the «deep hostility to everything mechanical, artificial, or constructed» and of the nostalgia for «the lost harmony between humans and nature»<sup>12</sup> addressed for example by Thomas Carlyle in the passages of *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History* (1841) in which the scientific reifying conception of nature as a steam engine is contrasted with its mythological vision as the «living TREE Igdrasil, with the melodious prophetic waving of its world-wide boughs»<sup>13</sup>. Similarly, a cry of horror resounds in *The Coming Insurrection* in the face of the modern urban hell, whose constitutive elements are «the digitized voices making announcements, [...] streetlamps shaped like giant matchsticks», and «the electronic ambiance of the cybercafe, the profusion of plasma screens, express lanes and latex»<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, the spiritual emptiness of modern cities reflects the logic of the work-centered rationalization leading to the methodical ravaging of all «that isn't work: the familiarities of one's neighborhood and trade, of one's village, of struggle, of kinship, our attachment to places, to beings, to the seasons»<sup>15</sup>. In other words, the manifesto brings out the «corrosive» effects of a work-based life conduct upon what goes beyond its scope and its logic, and, more precisely, upon the relationship with nature and with other human beings, sacrificed on the altar of the supreme god: time-disciplined work. As Werner Sombart remarked in his essay on *The Bourgeois* (1913) with a view to the repercussions of the economic rationalism on the psychological and existential condition of the *homo capitalisticus*, «if he devotes himself only to business, his soul dries up. [...] Nature, art, literature, state, friends: everything dissolves into an enigmatic nothing»<sup>16</sup>.

As evident from the passages quoted above, the specificity of *The Coming Insurrection* lies in the fact that its authors take up Romantic anticapitalist themes in order to launch an anarchist appeal against the existing socio-economic system. In this regard, the cultural sociologist Karl Mannheim had already pointed out the indebtedness of Marxism to the conservative critique of the abstractness of human relations in a capitalist world. According to the exponents of conservative cultural criticism, capitalist rationalization had entailed a «structural change in the attitude towards things»<sup>17</sup>, leading people to replace their relationships with human beings and concrete things with the interaction with commodities and money. In response to this phenomenon the conservative critique of bourgeois modernization undertook a reevaluation of the *qualitative mode of experience* of the pre-capitalist past by advocating the unmediated openness to the world lived in the fullness of its concrete aspects. To mention one example, the German writer and historian Justus Möser expressed his nostalgia for the feudal *living experience* of property as opposed to its abstract and impersonal bourgeois *concept*.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the Romantic attack on the bourgeois experience of the world involved an attempt at a «re-enthronement» of the *pre-capitalist* «qualitative values – ethical, social, and cultural»<sup>19</sup> in a totally renewed life-style. The endeavour of thinking out an ethical alternative to the modern rationalization and economization of life conduct is at the centre of August Klingemann's Romantic prose-work *The Night Watches of Bonaventura* (1805). The

protagonist states, in fact, that his lorgnette-epoch has subverted traditional values by dwarfing «the biggest objects»<sup>20</sup> and, conversely, by magnifying the insignificant ones. By contrast, he turns to the Cynic principle «that one must “*parakharattein to nomisma*” (alter, change the value of the currency)»<sup>21</sup>, i.e. revalue current values by «breaking up the rules, habits, conventions, and laws»<sup>22</sup> so as to adopt a new mode of being. As a result, through his rebellion against the state which commits «soul-murders»<sup>23</sup> by making people introject the imperatives of the bureaucratic work-logic and by reducing them to mere cogs of the power apparatus, Bonaventura, unlike his contemporaries, refuses to submit to the capitalist inner rationalization while making counter-values such as «a particular penchant for madness» and the commitment to the «chaos»<sup>24</sup> the lodestar of his life conduct. His opposition to modern society culminates in a revolt against its work-centered time regime in the name of the «poetically magnificent night»<sup>25</sup> experienced as the inner dimension that is devoted to enjoying idleness and reveries but contrasts with the «bright and prosaic day»<sup>26</sup> of bourgeois acquisitive activism.

Along the same line, *The Coming Insurrection* condemns the sacralization of economy and of work as the causes of transition from the pre-capitalist communitarian civilization in harmony with nature to the disfigured world of late capitalism. This world has grown out of the dissolution of communitarian tissues, thereby resulting in a society of atomized narcissistic egos dependent on their technological prostheses, so that the «proliferation of means of movement and communication» goes hand in hand with the increasing «uprootedness, isolation, and exile»<sup>27</sup>. This amounts to saying that modern man is deeply alienated from his original communitarian self. As the authors of the manifesto write:

What am I? Tied in every way to places, sufferings, ancestors, friends, loves, events, languages, memories, to all kinds of things that obviously are not me. Everything that attaches me to the world, all the links that constitute me, all the forces that compose me don't form an identity, a thing displayable on cue, but a singular, shared, living existence, from which emerges - at certain times and places - that being which says "I." Our feeling of inconsistency is simply the consequence of this foolish belief in the permanence of the self and of the little care we give to what makes us what we are.<sup>28</sup>

The diagnosis of the pathological character of modern subjectivity resembles the gnostic motif of man's alienation from his inmost nature consisting of the *pneuma*, «a portion of the divine substance from beyond which has fallen into the world»<sup>29</sup>. The ancient gnostics, in fact, developed an essentialist paradigm according to which there lies one true identity beneath the surface of its concealing and distorting psychical 'concretions' from which the *pneuma* has to be freed. Accordingly, they urged their followers to live authentically, that is to say to restore their selves to their true selfhood and cleanse it of «all the powers of alienation that impinge on man»<sup>30</sup>. For the gnostics the 'release of the «inner man»<sup>31</sup> took place through the individual's return to the center of him- or herself by way of an *epistrophē*, a turning around towards the self. As Pierre Hadot has highlighted, the Western practice of conversion has always been characterized by the oscillation between the idea of a reversion back to the original state of the soul (*epistrophē*) and the concept of its radical transformation (*metanoia*)<sup>32</sup>. In these terms, Michel Foucault maintains that «the model for *epistrophē* is awakening. [...] One opens one's eyes, one discovers the light and reverts to the

very source of the light»<sup>33</sup>. By contrast, *metanoia* «involves a drastic change of the mind» and «a sort of rebirth of the subject by himself»<sup>34</sup>. Foucault raises the issue of the way in which, during the 19th century, the self-technology<sup>35</sup> of conversion was placed in the new domain of political activity engendering the «experience of conversion to the revolution»<sup>36</sup>. Indeed, the French philosopher opened up a new field of research with the following words: «One day the history of what could be called revolutionary subjectivity should be written»<sup>37</sup>.

Interestingly, anarchism holds to a similar essentialist paradigm inasmuch as it «claims that the essential identity of the individual [...] is concealed and distorted by the powers of the state and religion»<sup>38</sup>. Hence, the necessity to destroy such institutions in order to liberate the inner core of selfhood and thus enable its full development. The same «essentialist politics»<sup>39</sup> was theorized by Mikhail Bakunin, too. In his *History of German Liberalism* the Russian anarchist defined man as an animal endowed with the faculty of thought and with the need to rebel. Bakunin saw history as a path toward human flourishing; at the same time, he regarded the state as the main obstacle to the true fulfillment of the humanity of man. In his view, the modern centralized state, which is deified by a form of «political theology», sets itself the task of turning man into a «citizen» by killing the «natural man»<sup>40</sup>, and it is for this very reason that the bourgeois state machine has to be shattered. Therefore, with the complete destruction of the modern state, and once it has been «delivered from all its governmental and doctrinaire barriers, and given full liberty of action»<sup>41</sup> will Life recover its creative power. What is at stake, thus, is the disalienation of man and his overall renewal; it is the possibility of recovering life's pre-state integrity.

It is noteworthy that the revolutionary anthropology outlined in *The Coming Insurrection* is grounded, on the one hand, in the Foucauldian theory of historicity and producibility of the subject, and, on the other, in anarchist essentialism. Nevertheless, Foucault's view of the state as «a modern matrix of individualization»<sup>42</sup>, as well as his project for the reconstruction of the history of subjectivity framed by technologies of domination, are at odds with the classical anarchist theory according to which a man's nature, though distorted by power, is not constructed by it, but rather it pre-exists *ab origine*. Unlike the anarchists, Foucault maintains that «power produces; it produces reality [...]. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production»<sup>43</sup>. Correspondingly, he identified the real essence of the modern state with the exertion of a *subjectifying power*, i.e. with a form of power aiming at fashioning the subjectivity of its citizens into the form needed to reach its goals. According to Foucault, the modern age has therefore been marked by the «struggle for a new subjectivity»<sup>44</sup> resulting in revolts that have sought to achieve liberation from the kind of identity imposed on man. The aim of *The Coming Insurrection* is precisely to trigger such a revolt in order to free man from the type of individualization required by the state.

Drawing on Foucault's thesis on the subject production as the sphere of action of the modern state apparatus, this manifesto asserts that «a civilization is not an abstraction hovering over life. It is what rules, takes possession of, colonizes the most banal, personal, daily existence»<sup>45</sup>. And shortly afterwards: «the older and more powerful the state, the less it is a super-structure or exoskeleton of a society and the more it constitutes the subjectivities that people it»<sup>46</sup>. In particular, «this construction of subjectivities by the state»<sup>47</sup> is based on the indoctrination through an «ethos

of mobility»<sup>48</sup> whose function is to promote the work-centered inner rationalization and the self-fashioning of individuals into depersonalised producers and consumers in order to preserve «by any means necessary the order of work»<sup>49</sup>. As the manifesto's authors pregnantly declare: «work has totally triumphed over all other ways of existing»<sup>50</sup>. At the same time, the ensuing «regime of mobility» functions as «a sorting machine that allocates survival to compliant subjectivities and rejects all problem individuals, all those who embody another use of life and, in this way, resist the machine», so that «ghosts are brought to life» and «the living are left to die»<sup>51</sup>. Still, the authors of *The Coming Insurrection* argue that this ghastly state-constructed self is going to be destroyed. They voice their conviction that they are facing «not the crisis of a society but the extinction of a civilization»<sup>52</sup> and thereby thematize «the chiliastic absolute experience of the now»<sup>53</sup> i.e. the perception of the present as pregnant with the conditions for the overthrow of the established order and for the apocalyptic renewal of the world. This sense of the «eschatological *non*»<sup>54</sup> was felt by the gnostics, too, because it implied the phase of *crisis* in which the gnostic subject decided to disalienate himself. Similarly, a crucial stage of the existential political path outlined in *The Coming Insurrection* is the decision to attain redemption from one's state of thrownness through a return to the pre-capitalist uncorrupted condition. Most significantly, and as with Gnosticism and Cynicism, the driving force of decision is the *awareness* of one's degraded state. In fact, the manifesto is structured around some key aspects which bear an extraordinary resemblance to central gnostic and Cynic tenets. To begin with, its authors correspond to the «spiritual men»<sup>55</sup> of the gnostic soteriology, who paved the way for man's redemption by revealing to him that he rested in an alienated condition and that he could nonetheless attain to the final reconciliation with his primeval essence. In this regard, Jonas adds that for the gnostics the very «reception of the truth» involved «a modification of the human condition» by making the knower «a partaker in the divine essence»<sup>56</sup>, and by inducing him to convert to a new mode of being-in-the-world. At the same time, with regard to the procedure of truth-telling [*parrhesia*], the authors of the manifesto also play the role of neo-Cynic *parrhesiastes* whose aim is to get people «to condemn, reject, despise, and insult the very manifestation of what they accept, or claim to accept at the level of principles»<sup>57</sup> and to convert to alternative values. In this sense, Klingemann turns out to be a Romantic parrhesiast insofar as he confronts the protagonist of the *The Night Watches* with the vision of a robot-like bureaucrat which reinforces his critical attitude towards society: Bonaventura describes him as a frightful «being»<sup>58</sup> in whom nothing human has survived annihilation and who looks like a lifeless, other-directed marionette. In this perspective, Klingemann's account of the journey of his hero across the hell of capitalist civilization serves to put it down on paper in order to help readers to become aware of the evils of modernity and to get rid of the modern «puppet-soul»<sup>59</sup> of the *homo burocraticus* and of the underlying ethos of mobility. Thus, Klingemann fulfills the role of a «psychagog»<sup>60</sup> who makes use of a literary text in order to urge his readers to an inner – and anti-bourgeois – renewal.

*The Night Watches of Bonaventura* therefore throw light on the change undergone by the ancient parrhesiastic ethics of truth-revelation in the context of Romantic and revolutionary anti-capitalism. Epictetus defined the Cynic as a *kataskopos* (scout, spy) whose task consisted in being 'humanity's spy' and in returning «to tell humanity the truth, to tell humanity frankly and

courageously all the dangers it might face and where its true enemies are to be found»<sup>61</sup>. For this very reason, the Cynics resorted to the practice of public preaching and «liked to speak in a theater, or at a place where people had gathered for a feast, religious event, athletic contest, etc.»<sup>62</sup> as Diogenes himself used to do<sup>63</sup>. In this regard, Klingemann's book – which was published anonymously – as well as *The Coming Insurrection* document that the public voice of the ancient *parrhesia* has been stifled, so to speak, in the modern age of the rebellion against capitalism since it can tell the truth about modern civilization and urge to revolutionary action and to self-deliverance from the grip of the capitalist subjectivity shaped by unvalues *only* by means of a text and *under the protection of anonymity*. This process of *textualization and of anonymization of the revolutionary truth-telling* has gone hand in hand with the emergence of a form of revolutionary asceticism<sup>64</sup> demanding the renunciation of one's name. As Sergey Nechayev wrote in his anonymous *Revolutionary Catechism* (1869), «the revolutionary is a consecrated man. He has no personal interests, no business affairs, no emotions, no attachments, no property, and not even a name. Everything in him is wholly absorbed in the single thought and the single passion for revolution»<sup>65</sup>. The Russian plotter therefore wanted to explain to the members of his secret society how they could experience the conversion opening the access to the deindividualized subjectivity of the new man wholly devoted to the revolutionary cause. The *Catechism* also underpins the thesis that the voice prompting the *metanoia* has undergone a process of textualization and of anonymization in the age of revolutions. Needless to say, the revolutionary paradoxically erases his identity precisely in order to let his voice *resound* louder. In this perspective, the brief anonymous text entitled *The Mark of Life. The Search for a highly imaginative Way towards the Destruction of the Existing Order* (2012), which claimed the responsibility of an Italian anarchist cell for a terrorist attack, exemplifies in a paradigmatic way the tactics of the anonymization of the *parrhesia*. Its authors contrast the passive flight into a self-imposed sterile anonymity seeking an outlet by writing inflammatory articles with the truly revolutionary anonymity of the anarchists who give expression to their stifled voice by proceeding to *action*. The truth-telling written down in the manifesto is therefore associated with the traditional strategy of the propaganda by the deed in order to give rise to a *parrhesia* of direct action unmasking the mechanisms and the functionaries of the state apparatus<sup>66</sup>. Its purpose is to address people «made up of flesh and dream»<sup>67</sup> and, at the same time, to *let words at last bear the mark of life*. To go back to *The Coming Insurrection*, it is remarkable that this text clearly bears witness to the process of textualization and of anonymization of the parrhesiastic voice revealing to its readers the evils of modernity and calling upon them to abandon the identity imposed on them by the power apparatus and to convert to the *revolutionary selfhood* ready to fight against it. This conception of the conversion to a radically new way of being-in-the-world brought about by the *transformative reception* of the truth appears in the following passage of the manifesto:

An encounter, a discovery, a vast wave of strikes, an earthquake: every event produces truth by changing our way of being in the world. [...] A truth isn't a view on the world but what binds us to it in an irreducible way. A truth isn't something we hold but something that carries us. It makes and unmakes me, constitutes and undoes me as an individual; it distances me from many and brings me closer to those who also experience it.<sup>68</sup>

*The Coming Insurrection* may thus be defined as a gnostic revolutionary manifesto that brings to light the decisive role played by the self-technology of conversion in the form of the *metanoia* – the total change in one's mode of existence in accordance with new values and schemes of thought – and in the form of an *epistrophē* marking the turning around towards the original self because the reader can again attain to his pre-capitalist communitarian identity in a radically renewed society only by turning into a revolutionary determined to wipe out the bourgeois state. The revolutionary man is described, in fact, as a new man. He who decides to get rid of the «corpse»<sup>69</sup> of capitalist civilization achieves release from his devitalized selfhood subject to the artificial order of the metropolis and experiences a life-enhancement thanks to the instinctual breakthrough taking place in the uprisings. It is no accident that the manifesto celebrates the life vigour of the banlieux rebels:

Vitality has taken up quarters in the so-called 'problem' neighborhoods. [...] The dormitory towers in the suburbs north of Paris, abandoned by a petty bourgeoisie that went off hunting for swimming pools, have been brought back to life by mass unemployment and now radiate more energy than the Latin Quarter. In words as much as fire.<sup>70</sup>

According to the authors of *The Coming Insurrection*, such a vitalistic explosion will mark the first destructive phase of the revolutionary project of changing the nature of man and of building a transfigured society. On closer examination, this inner-wordly *renovatio mundi* turns out to be closely related to the Romantic ideal of the re-establishment of a pre-capitalist community, which takes the post-1968 form of the commune. The communes are «the basic unit of partisan reality»<sup>71</sup> and should be the germ cells of the new world to be created by uniting them. Most importantly, the *epistrophē* involving the reconciliation with the pre-capitalist communitarian self will take place in this new utopian dimension, in which the capitalist set of values will be overturned, too. In particular, the manifesto calls for the practical abolition of money and for a collective demobilization leading «to organize beyond and against work, to collectively desert the regime of mobility» in order «to demonstrate the existence of a vitality»<sup>72</sup> unattainable for the bourgeois man. In the spirit of Romanticism this ethos of demobilization based on the qualitative counter-value of idleness finds expression in the following passage:

Personal time for social existence: such is work, such is the market. From the outset, the time of the commune eludes work, it doesn't function according to that scheme – it prefers others. [...] The exigency of the commune is to free up the most time for the most people. And we're not just talking about the number of hours free of any wage-labor exploitation. Liberated time doesn't mean a vacation. Vacant time, dead time, the time of emptiness and the fear of emptiness – this is the time of work. There will be no more time to fill, but a liberation of energy that no 'time' contains.<sup>73</sup>

What is thematized here is an idleness-based *ethics of self*<sup>74</sup>, presented as the new code of conduct for members of the commune who constitute themselves as new men overflowing with energy by subverting, like Bonaventura does, the work-centered time regime institutionalized by capitalist society. Thus, they enjoy a qualitative time dimension open to self-concern and to experiments with one's own self. The stifled voice of the manifesto advocates nothing less than a new time

experience. As Lukács remarks in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), the rationalization process taking place in bourgeois society permeates «every expression of life»<sup>75</sup> leading to the progressive elimination of their qualitative aspects and to the triumph of the commodity «as the universal structuring principle»<sup>76</sup>. From this it follows that «the pendulum of the clock», to quote Marx, «has become as accurate a measure of the relative activity of two workers as it is of the speed of two locomotives», so that «quality no longer matters. Quantity alone decides everything»<sup>77</sup>. As Lukács put it:

Time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable things (the reified, mechanically objectified performance of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality): in short, it becomes space.<sup>78</sup>

Time has therefore been spatialised and reified into a container filled with work-performances and, lastly, into «a commodity that can be measured and bought and sold like soap»<sup>79</sup>, as George Woodcock observed. What is at issue, therefore, is the recovery of the qualitative dimension of *lived* time, as opposed to the time of emptiness, through the self-liberation from the internalised work-oriented time discipline and the turning towards idleness, that is towards one's self opening up to a liberation of energy. In this sense, *The Coming Insurrection* shows significant analogies with Paul Lafargue's pamphlet on *The Right to be Lazy* (1883), in which the French Marxist writer, following the Romantic tradition of the 'counter-ethicization' of idleness, exhorted the proletariat to trample under foot the «dogma of work»<sup>80</sup> and to «proclaim the Rights of Laziness, a thousand times more noble and more sacred than the anaemic Rights of Man concocted by the metaphysical lawyers of the bourgeois revolution» in order to «return to its natural instincts»<sup>81</sup> and to cause «the old earth»<sup>82</sup> to tremble with joy.

No less Romantic is the figure of the idler as opposed to the bourgeois man. Friedrich Schlegel has given a decisive contribution to the ethicization of this anti-capitalist hero and of his ideal of life as a work of art in his novel *Lucinde* (1799). The German writer saw the modern world as being dominated by a relentless struggle for profit, and undertook a revaluation of values by contrasting Prometheus as the symbol of the work ethos with Hercules, whose primary aim was always to rejoice in idleness. Accordingly, Schlegel turned to the ancient art of enjoying leisure, yet, at the same time, he modernized it by casting the underlying mode of existence against the bourgeois Promethean compulsion toward activism. Moreover, he ascribed to the ensuing idleness-based ethics of self the function of furthering the self-fashioning of a subject in possession of a fully developed individuality.

The ideal of the revitalization of man by way of a revolution for the moral renewal of society was eloquently advocated by Richard Wagner in his essay on *Art and Revolution* (1849). The bourgeois world appeared to the young exile as «the efflorescence of corruption, of a hollow, soulless and unnatural condition of human affairs and human relations»<sup>83</sup> grounded in the religion of money-worship. Consequently, man had been degraded to a «slave of wages»<sup>84</sup>, «whom bankers and manufacturers teach nowadays to seek the goal of Being in manual toil for daily bread»<sup>85</sup>. Only a revolution could put an end to this wretched condition:



From the dishonouring slave-yoke of universal journeymanhood, with its sickly Money-soul, we wish to soar to the free manhood of Art, with the star-rays of its World-soul; from the weary, overburdened day-labourers of Commerce, we desire to grow to fair strong men, to whom the world belongs as an eternal, inexhaustible source of the highest delights of Art. To this end we need the mightiest force of Revolution.<sup>86</sup>

Therefore, the purpose of the revolution envisaged by Wagner is to reshape the man of the industrial civilization into a new man, to whom art will open up an entirely new realm of enjoyment previously made inaccessible by world-contempting Christianity and by money-worshipping bourgeois society. Art will lay the foundation of a the future community guided by counter-values, because, in Wagner's words, theatrical performances will be «the first associate undertakings from which the idea of wage or gain shall disappear entirely»<sup>87</sup>.

It now seems apparent that the authors of *The Coming Insurrection* have placed the gnostic-revolutionary tenets of the non-self-identity of being and of man's endeavour to recover his original selfhood within the Cynic tradition of the free-spokenness and of the revaluation of values as well as within the Romantic conceptual framework of the ethics of idleness and of the pre-Nietzschean ideal of life-enhancement. In the spirit of anarchism, they add that the psychic reorganization of man will have to culminate in the rise of a subject totally free from the «need for authority» and from the «desire for hegemony»<sup>88</sup>. Indulging into a chiliastic mood, they end up prophesying the future destruction of Paris: «A day will come when this capital and its horrible concretion of power will lie in majestic ruins, but it will be at the end of a process that will be far more advanced everywhere else»<sup>89</sup>.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> A. Camus, *The Rebel. An Essay on Man in Revolt* (New York, 1984), p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> E. Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint* (Columbia, Missouri, 2000), p. 191.

<sup>3</sup> C. O' Reagan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity* (New York, 2001), p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston, 1958), p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> O. Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (London, 1926), vol. 2, p. 239.

<sup>6</sup> The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009), p. 105.

<sup>7</sup> Ivi., 54.

<sup>8</sup> Ivi., 33.

<sup>9</sup> O. Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, p. 99.

<sup>10</sup> Ivi., 98.

<sup>11</sup> Ivi., p. 92.

<sup>12</sup> M. Löwy – R. Sayre, *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity* (Durham and London, 2001), p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> T. Carlyle, *The Works of Thomas Carlyle* (New York, 1897), vol. 12, p. 393.

<sup>14</sup> The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, p. 75.

<sup>15</sup> Ivi., p. 46.

<sup>16</sup> W. Sombart, *Der Bourgeois. Zur Geistesgeschichte des modernen Wirtschaftsmenschen* (München und Leipzig, 1913), pp. 454-455.

<sup>17</sup> K. Mannheim, *Konservatismus. Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie des Wissens* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984), p. 81.

<sup>18</sup> Ivi., p. 112.

<sup>19</sup> M. Löwy – R. Sayre, "Figures of Romantic Anticapitalism", in: *New German Critique*, N° 32 (Durham, 1984), p. 58.

- <sup>20</sup> A. Klingemann, *Nachtwachen von Bonaventura* (Stuttgart, 1964), p. 67.
- <sup>21</sup> M. Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth (The Government of Self and Others II)* (New York, 2011), p. 239.
- <sup>22</sup> Ivi, p. 242.
- <sup>23</sup> A. Klingemann, *Nachtwachen von Bonaventura*, p. 62.
- <sup>24</sup> Ivi, p. 48.
- <sup>25</sup> Ivi, p. 41.
- <sup>26</sup> Ivi, p. 40.
- <sup>27</sup> The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, p. 59.
- <sup>28</sup> Ivi, pp. 31-32.
- <sup>29</sup> H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, p. 44.
- <sup>30</sup> Ivi, p. XXVI.
- <sup>31</sup> Ivi, p. 44.
- <sup>32</sup> Cf. P. Hadot, *Exercises spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris, 2002), p. 223.
- <sup>33</sup> M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject. Lectures at the Collège de France* (New York, 2005), p. 216.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>35</sup> Cf. Foucault: «It is not enough to say that the subject is constituted in a symbolic system. It is not just in the play of symbols that the subject is constituted. It is constituted in real practices – historically analyzable practices. There is a technology of the constitution of the self which cuts across symbolic systems while using them. [...] Techniques of the self, I believe, can be found in all cultures in different forms. Just as it is necessary to study and compare the different techniques of the production of objects and the direction of men by men through government, one must also question techniques of the self» (Foucault, “Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth,” in: *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*. Vol. 1. New York, The New Press, 1997, p. 277).
- <sup>36</sup> M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject. Lectures at the Collège de France*, p. 208.
- <sup>37</sup> Ivi, In *The Courage of the Truth* he also remarks: ‘Philosophical heroism, philosophical ethics will no longer find a place in the practice of philosophy as a teaching profession, but in that other, displaced and transformed form of philosophical life in the political field: the revolutionary life. Exit Faust, and enter the revolutionary.’ (M. Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, p. 211).
- <sup>38</sup> S. Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Lanham, 2001), p. 13.
- <sup>39</sup> Ivi, p. 57.
- <sup>40</sup> M. Bakunin, *Gesammelte Werke* (Berlin, 1975), vol. 2, pp. 16-17.
- <sup>41</sup> M. Bakunin, *God and the State* (Toronto, 1970), p. 62.
- <sup>42</sup> H. L. Dreyfus – P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago, 1982), p. 215.
- <sup>43</sup> M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (New York, 1977), p. 194.
- <sup>44</sup> H. L. Dreyfus – P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, p. 213.
- <sup>45</sup> The invisible committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, p. 86.
- <sup>46</sup> Ivi, p. 87.
- <sup>47</sup> Ivi, p. 37.
- <sup>48</sup> Ivi, p. 50.
- <sup>49</sup> Ivi, p. 49.
- <sup>50</sup> Ivi, p. 46.
- <sup>51</sup> Ivi, p. 51.
- <sup>52</sup> Ivi, p. 94.
- <sup>53</sup> K. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia. An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York and London, 1954), p. 203.
- <sup>54</sup> H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, p. 335.
- <sup>55</sup> Irenaeus, *The Writings of Irenaeus* (Edinburgh and London, 1868), p. 24.
- <sup>56</sup> Ivi, pp. 34-35.
- <sup>57</sup> M. Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, p. 234.

<sup>58</sup> A. Klingemann, *Nachtwachen von Bonaventura*, p. 18.

<sup>59</sup> Ivi, p. 19.

<sup>60</sup> «If, then, we call ‘pedagogical’ this relationship consisting in endowing any subject whomsoever with a series of abilities defined in advance, we can, I think, call ‘psychagogical’ the transmission of a truth whose function is not to endow any subject whomsoever with abilities, et cetera, but whose function is to modify the mode of being of the subject to whom we address ourselves» (M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject. Lectures at the Collège de France*, p. 407).

<sup>61</sup> M. Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, p. 170.

<sup>62</sup> M. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, (Los Angeles, 2001), p.119.

<sup>63</sup> On this point, cf. the following remarks by Diogenes Laertius: ‘On one occasion he was asked, what was the most excellent thing among men; and he said, ‘Freedom of speech’. Accordingly, ‘he used to say, that he imitated the teachers of choruses, for that they spoke too loud, in order that the rest might catch the proper tone’. See Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers. Book I* (London, 1915), pp. 243, 229.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. M. Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits IV (1980–1988)* (Frankfurt am Main, 2005), p. 74.

<sup>65</sup> K. Marx – F. Engels, “Ein Komplott gegen die Internationale Arbeiterassoziation. Im Auftrage des Haager Kongresses verfaßter Bericht über das Treiben Bakunins und der Allianz der sozialistischen Demokratie”, in: *Werke*, Bd. XVIII. (Berlin, 1962), p. 427 (my translation).

<sup>66</sup> For these concepts, see Sheehan: «The use of political violence in anarchist activities comes from the tradition of direct action, and while this tradition does not necessarily endorse violence, it has a history of using violence. This tradition goes back to Bakunin and propaganda by the deed, and the anarchism in Italy in the 1870s when a strategy of guerrilla propaganda was developed. A band of anarchists would mount an insurrection in one town, demonstrate what could be done and then, having roused class consciousness, leave the inhabitants to take it from there» (S. Sheehan, *Anarchism*, London, 2003, p. 106).

<sup>67</sup> *Il Marchio della Vita. Cercando una via immaginifica alla distruzione dell'esistente*, in: *Vertice dell'abisso. Foglio Quindicinale Egoista Nichilista*, N° 5, p. 2 (my translation).

<sup>68</sup> The invisible committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, p. 97.

<sup>69</sup> Ivi, p. 94.

<sup>70</sup> Ivi, pp. 55-56.

<sup>71</sup> Ivi, p. 117.

<sup>72</sup> Ivi, p. 51.

<sup>73</sup> Ivi, pp. 103-104.

<sup>74</sup> Foucault defines the ethics of self as the form of self-relationship in which ‘one is called upon to take oneself as an object of knowledge and a field of action, so as to transform, correct, and purify oneself, and find salvation’ (M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 3. The Care of the Self*, New York, 1986, p. 42).

<sup>75</sup> G. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), p. 84.

<sup>76</sup> Ivi, p. 85.

<sup>77</sup> Ivi, pp. 89-90.

<sup>78</sup> Ivi, p. 90.

<sup>79</sup> G. Woodcock, *A George Woodcock Reader* (Ottawa, 1980), p. 37.

<sup>80</sup> P. Lafargue, *The Right to be Lazy and Other Studies* (Chicago, 1907), p. 34.

<sup>81</sup> Ivi, p. 29.

<sup>82</sup> Ivi, p. 56.

<sup>83</sup> R. Wagner, *Prose Works* (London, 1895), vol. 1, p. 43.

<sup>84</sup> Ivi, p. 63.

<sup>85</sup> Ivi, p. 51.

<sup>86</sup> Ivi, p. 54.

<sup>87</sup> Ivi, p. 64.

<sup>88</sup> The invisible committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>89</sup> Ivi, p. 132.