

Post-Humanist Interventions: Ethical and Political Challenges to Neoliberalism  
in the Transmedia Project of the Wu Ming Collective

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## Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the cultural forms of intervention of the Italian writing collective using the pseudonym Wu Ming (2000). As Wu Ming's activism is grounded in a clear-cut ethico-political position against neoliberal ideology, I will analyse it to challenge the naturalization of this ideology and demonstrate that cultural interventions can imagine and bring about alternative ethical relations and political subjectivities. Drawing on theories of performativity, post-workerist political theories and post-humanist thought, I argue that Wu Ming's combination of embodied, literary and online interventions fosters the formation of practices, life rhythms and political subjectivities alternative to anthropocentric, fast-paced and hyper-individualized models imposed by neoliberal ideology.

The first chapter of this dissertation maps out the evolution of Wu Ming's activism and provides a comprehensive analysis of the scholarship on the collective. The second chapter draws on post-workerist political theories in order to analyse Wu Ming's participation in the alter-global movement and demonstrate that their early strategy was to negate neoliberal discourses without producing any constructive political alternative. The third chapter shows how Wu Ming later concentrated on constructing this alternative in the literary field, where they used their imagination to explore post-anthropocentric dialogic dimensions and new ethical relations to the human and nonhuman other. Finally, the last chapter wonders how these imaginary experiences and post-anthropocentric dialogic approaches can foster a political praxis synergistically combining the online and offline worlds.

## Résumé

Cette thèse se concentre sur les formes culturelles d'intervention du collectif d'écriture italien qui utilise le pseudonyme Wu Ming (2000). Comme l'activisme de Wu Ming est fondé sur une position éthique et politique claire contre l'idéologie néolibérale, je vais analyser cet activisme afin de remettre en question la naturalisation de cette idéologie et de démontrer que les interventions culturelles peuvent éventuellement imaginer et susciter des relations éthiques et des subjectivités politiques alternatives. M'appuyant sur les théories de la performativité, les théories politiques post-ouvrières et la pensée post-humaniste, je soutiens que la combinaison d'interventions matérielles, littéraires et en ligne de Wu Ming favorise la formation de pratiques, de rythmes de vie et de subjectivités politiques alternatives aux modèles anthropocentriques, accélérés et hyper-individualisés imposés par l'idéologie néolibérale.

Le premier chapitre de cette thèse retrace l'évolution de l'activisme de Wu Ming et fournit une analyse complète de la littérature sur le collectif. Le deuxième chapitre s'appuie sur les théories politiques post-ouvrières afin d'analyser la participation de Wu Ming au mouvement altermondialiste et de démontrer que leur première stratégie est de nier les discours néolibéraux sans produire d'alternative politique constructive. Le troisième chapitre montre comment Wu Ming se concentre plus tard sur la construction de cette alternative dans le domaine littéraire, où ils utilisent leur imagination pour explorer de nouvelles relations éthiques avec les autres (humaines et non-humaines) et la dimension dialogique d'une manière post-anthropocentrique. Enfin, le dernier chapitre examine comment ces expériences imaginaires et approches dialogiques post-anthropocentriques peuvent éventuellement conduire à une praxis politique combinant de manière synergique le monde en ligne et hors ligne.

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## Introduction

London, 1979. A lady wearing a Prussian-blue dress steps on a stage and walks towards the pulpit at its centre. The flashes of hundreds of cameras illuminate her walk, while a cornucopia of mics suddenly rises from the audience. The lady, the neo-elected UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, starts speaking.<sup>1</sup> Her tone of voice is low, the pace of her speech slow. She is about to tell a sad and dramatic story. It is the story of a country where the welfare system and nationalized industries are too costly and the state spends too much to guarantee its citizens a decent life. *There is no alternative*, she says; things have to change. We are all going to suffer, she continues, “if we refuse to face reality until it comes face to face with us. Then *there is no alternative*. There is a part for all of us to play” (Thatcher, “Speech”). There is no alternative, she will repeat in the next years, to mutate a collectivist society and nationalised economy into an individualist, selective and highly competitive social environment informed by market laws. There is no alternative, think of Thatcher’s and later conservative governments’ (1979–96) economic policies, to embody the radical belief that a free market produces better citizens, people able to stand up for themselves, independently claim their rights and achieve a high standard of living. There is no alternative to this approach, Thatcher argues, as it is the most faithful to the nature and essence of humankind (in Berlinski, *There* 48, 147).

Thatcher’s insistent argument about the lack of an alternative to neoliberal economic policies represented a blueprint for the political, social and cultural evolution of the western

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<sup>1</sup> In this passage and the rest of the paragraph I operate a personal reconstruction of Thatcher’s speech in narrative form. The sources of this reconstruction are the speech transcriptions available on the Margaret Thatcher Foundation website (<https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107300>) and her 1985 interview about UK miners’ strike hosted by the TV Eye television program. Other sources also present an account of the politician’s agenda, such as Claire Berlinski’s *There is No Alternative: Why Margaret Thatcher Matters* and the scholar’s lecture for the 2010 C-Span Book TV series of The Heritage Foundation (August 31, 2010).

world in the 1980s and '90s. Ronald Reagan's conservative agenda on the other side of the pond or, in the Italian case, the program of privatizations promoted by media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi are local examples of this transformation. However, Thatcher's ambitious and quasi-philosophical claim, as well as the control progressively exercised by international financial institutions (G8, WTO, IMF among others) over the process of globalization in the second half of the twentieth century, reveal that this transformation cannot be circumscribed within the economic domain, and even less in the space of a single country—be it the UK, USA or Italy.

In 1995, Ignacio Ramonet denounced that the (alleged) impossibility of imagining a sustainable alternative to neoliberal economic policies is the cornerstone of the neoliberal ideology that has progressively been naturalized and seen as a “pensée unique” or unique thought, the only possible way to think, conceive and imagine economic, social and political relations (1). For Ramonet, “unique thought” is a doctrine: “la traduction en termes idéologiques à prétention universelle des intérêts d'un ensemble de forces économiques, celles, en particulier, du capital international” (1). The media industry constantly repeats the doctrine of free market, competition and privatization. Doing this “lui confère une telle force d'intimidation qu'elle étouffe toute tentative de réflexion libre, et rend fort difficile la résistance contre ce nouvel obscurantisme” (1). Even in the cultural domain, there seems to be no alternative to neoliberal obscurantism. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri wrote, in the current system of production “the economic, the political, and the cultural increasingly overlap and invest one another” (*Empire* xiii). In Jeffrey Nealon's elaboration on Fredric Jameson, the entanglement of economy and culture is complete. There is no other “natural” space where the creation of cultural products and the aesthetic experiences they produce are not related to the economic system and therefore to the laws of the market (51, 22). Therefore, there seems to be no alternative for culture but to

be dominated by the same unique thought that dictates economic practices. Boundaries between forms of economic and cultural production collapse, as neoliberal ideology makes the latter work for the market. For Christian Salmon, neoliberal ideology transforms every cultural phenomenon and every manifestation of the narratives they contain, into an instrument of control and power aimed to reiterate the neoliberal logic and foster market growth (5–7). We may be induced to kneel finally in front of Thatcher’s mantra: there is no alternative to neoliberalism.

This study aims to examine whether and how it is possible to challenge this mantra and demonstrate that there are political and cultural forms of intervention that can still imagine, envision and put into practice an alternative to neoliberalism. In order to explore these possibilities, I will study the case of the Italian writing collective that uses the pseudonym Wu Ming.<sup>2</sup> The backbone of Wu Ming’s activism is a clear-cut ethico-political position that programmatically aims to undermine neoliberal approaches to culture, society and politics and construct an alternative to it. My aim is to examine how Wu Ming’s successes and failures in the pursuit of these endeavours result from a sustained and highly original engagement with contemporary theories and practices of resistance to “unique thought.” In the next four chapters, therefore, I will map out Wu Ming’s twenty years of activism, follow its multiple trajectories and use this cartographic account to reflect upon the ethico-political and ontological grounds of their interventions.

*Neoliberalism* and the label *neoliberal* are often used in relation to multiple phenomena and with different nuances in Europe and North America. It is thus necessary to make a preliminary clarification on my use of this concept in this study. This clarification will also give me the opportunity to introduce Maurizio Lazzarato’s analysis of neoliberal capitalism, one of

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<sup>2</sup> In Mandarin Chinese, Wu Ming may mean “nameless,” “anonymous” or “five names” according to how one pronounces it. I will investigate in more detail the collective’s reasons for choosing this pseudonym, in Chapter 1.

the two cornerstones of my theoretical framework. The core of Lazzarato's argument is that the construction of an alternative to neoliberalism entails a radical ethical and ontological shift of perspective, one that redefines subjectivity and their relation to the human and nonhuman other from an eco-centric standpoint. Karen Barad's post-humanist ontology (my second theoretical cornerstone) operates this significant shift and offers an invaluable theoretical tool for analysing and demonstrating the significance of Wu Ming's anti-neoliberal strategy.

## Neoliberalism 101

Neoliberalism is generally considered a theory of political and economic practices based on market freedom, competition, the globalization of production processes and financial fluxes, private property rights and free trade (Ramonet 1; Thorsen and Lie 8, 14). Neoliberal policies in particular (Thatcher's, for instance) conceive of the market as a space in which free competition functions as the basic mechanism of governance and informs the whole neoliberal system—its politics, society and culture (Kiersey 169; Wilson 55). The market and the international institutions that represent it (G8, IMF, WTO, among others) subsume state governments and limit their task to securing property rights and guaranteeing the regime of free competition (Thorsen and Lie 11). Moreover, as previously argued, the neoliberal model of the market shapes a specific ideology and a set of practices presenting consequences in the social and cultural domain (Glass 352). Louis Althusser's definition of ideology as an "imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence in contemporary society" (109) is useful here. It helps explain how, as ideology, neoliberalism naturalizes a specific set of historical narratives, cultural standards and norms to establish what Michel Foucault calls a "regime of truth" (in Wilson 55). This regime of truth is functional to the maintenance of the neoliberal system (i.e.,

the market as a space of free competition and its participants as subsumed producers) and apparatuses of exploitation of its components, including human and nonhuman entities.

As Nealon argues, neoliberal apparatuses do not only limit their operations to economic and cultural production. They also shape subjects' agency and their potential for action according to market needs (39). In Lazzarato's analysis of neoliberal capitalism, these apparatuses enact biopolitical forms of control whose ultimate goal is to produce subjectivity (*Signs* 8), that is to say the ensemble of conditions for subjects to emerge, desire and act (Guattari 9). Controlling the process of subjectivation is essential for neoliberal ideology, as its ultimate aim is to subsume every aspect of life—from physiological needs to existential drives—and make it functional to market growth. Drawing on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Lazzarato distinguishes two apparatuses of control of the production of subjectivity: the apparatus of “social subjection” (*Signs* 24), which operates at the molar level, and the apparatus of “machinic enslavement” (*Signs* 25), which controls the molecular one.

The apparatus of social subjection operates at the discursive level and produces social roles that subjects are expected to fill, identify and deal with (*Signs* 12). These roles encompass, among others, the temporary worker, the wife, the entrepreneur, the terrorist. Caught by the semiotic net of neoliberal ideology, individuated subjects accept these roles without questioning their nature. Through the definition of these roles, which are not established once and for all but mutate according to the contingent needs of the market, neoliberal ideology controls social dynamic at the discursive level and conditions the behaviour, habits and practices of human subjects. According to Lazzarato, two roles are peculiar to neoliberal ideology: human capital and entrepreneur of the self (*Signs* 24). The analysis of the features of these two social roles unveils how neoliberal ideology devises the relationship of the human individual to her own

body, time, and life, as well as her interaction with the human and nonhuman others. In this study, I will argue that Wu Ming's interventions specifically work toward elaborating a set of relationalities and interactions radically different from the ones promoted by neoliberal ideology and specifically those related to the two key roles just mentioned. It is therefore worthwhile taking more time to consider with precision the conception and practices of subjectivity they entail.

As human capital, the individual is expected to perceive her life and time as a commodity and therefore think of it in terms of profit (Kiersey 168; Wilson 64). Human beings are reduced to financial entities whose life and experiences are the result of capital investments. The value of life is therefore supposed to be quantifiable in terms of market value. An experience is valuable if it increases or enhances my value (i.e., my agency as economic agent) within, for instance, the labour market, while it has no value if it does not increase my possibility of being competitive. As the subject is pushed to increase her own human capital within the space of the market, every single aspect of neoliberal life is instrumental to global market growth and therefore subsumed by its logic. The market and its rule, as previously mentioned, become the pattern according to which neoliberal subjects are designed and produced. The subject is also pushed to think of herself as an entrepreneur that must compete with others in order to thrive. As self-entrepreneur (Kiersey 168; Wilson 4), the neoliberal subject must be free to choose what she considers the best strategy to prevail against others. The subject must be able to stand up for herself, as Thatcher would suggest, and remain exclusively responsible for her choices, personal well-being, and success.

The human capital and self-entrepreneurship concepts imply a specific notion of the subject that I want to spell out in four corollaries. First, as competitor and self-entrepreneur, the

subject is the hyper-individualized centre of her own life (the privileged focus of her action). She acts autonomously and cannot expect any help, support or productive contribution from others. Any entity that does not comply with my views, answer my needs, satisfy my desires (i.e., the views, needs, desires of the market) is an outcast, a threat, a terrorist. The ethics of neoliberalism are grounded in competition, opportunism, selfishness, individualism, dominance and violence.

Second, any instance of materiality, be it the subject's own body, that of human or animal others, or part of the material environment, is a disposable entity whose value is subsumed by the discursive logic of the market. I want to stress this theoretical point: neoliberal ideology relies upon a clear-cut dichotomy between matter and discourse and conceives of the former as a passive mould that the latter shapes (i.e., commodifies) according to its economic needs.

Third, this commodification process is bound to the temporal dimension and therefore time becomes the first and most essential commodity of all. Fast-paced work environments, rising sleep deprivation rates, the purported need to communicate, walk, eat as fast as possible are all symptoms of the same basic assumption. Any delay is time wasted—a lost opportunity to acquire information, experiences, pleasures that have exchange value in the market. Identifying with the roles of human capital and self-entrepreneurship entails living an accelerated life rhythm, one determined by the market's need to produce value as quickly as possible.

Fourth, to foster the production of value, neoliberal ideology compels subjects to think of themselves as enterprises whose success is conditional upon “their own initiative and entrepreneurial creativity” (Wilson 122). The concept of self-entrepreneurship interestingly re-elaborates typically humanist tenets: individualism, the creative genius, self-determination, autonomy and perfectibility (Davies 16–17; Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 13, 23). The neoliberal re-elaboration of these tenets, in a quite Machiavellian fashion, “compels subjects to willingly and

‘freely’ take on risks (i.e., debt, uncertainty) in the name of self-empowerment” (Wilson 121). These risks put a lot of pressure on the subject, especially on the results of her actions. Each singular action is an investment and the way it performs in the market (i.e., whether it ultimately produces value or not) is what really counts for the subject. The creativity of the subject is therefore channelled toward those actions and practices that can more easily guarantee the success of her enterprise in the market and, ultimately, the growth of the market as a whole.

From this description of the apparatus of social subjection, we may conclude that neoliberalism is a form of discourse that finds its power and force in the constant reiteration and re-enactment of practices by the subjects it produces (Glass 352). Constructing an alternative to this discourse and the forms of social subjectivation it establishes would therefore entail designing experimental practices of appropriation and subversion. The ultimate aim of these subversive practices should be fostering alternatives to the basic features of neoliberal discourse. These features include hyper-individualism, a passive conception of matter, accelerated life rhythms, the humanist definition of the subject and performativity. These are precisely the practices of subversion that my analysis of Wu Ming’s activism will seek to identify and investigate.

While the apparatus of social subjection operates at the discursive level, the process of machinic enslavement, the second layer recognized by Lazzarato, runs deeper. It reaches the pre-discursive molecular level and produces a more complex and ramified modality of subjectivity. Deleuze, Guattari, and Lazzarato use the concept of machine to describe life as a complex assemblage of flowing entities, forces and energies. Life is machinic insofar as it is the product of a plural set of contiguous entities that communicate (i.e., share their constituent parts) and bring about new affects, material configurations, forms of expressions and subjectivities



(Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 36; Lazzarato, *Gouverner* 18–19). The subject does not participate in these assemblages as an individuated entity, for instance as entrepreneur of herself, but as a “gear, a cog” internally split into multiple “component parts of subjectivity (intelligence, affects, sensations, cognition, memory, physical force)” that “are no longer unified in an ‘I,’ they no longer have an individuated subject as referent” (Lazzarato, *Signs* 27). The synthesis of all these components does not coincide with the subject. It does so in the assemblage or process she is part of (Lazzarato, *Signs* 27). The machinic enslavement apparatus programmatically exploits these assemblages to make the market and its logic thrive.

An example will help clarify these concepts. Let us consider a Facebook user. At the discursive level, the apparatus of social subjection assigns the subject a specific position that distinguishes her (the user) from her object (laptop, smartphone, etc.), as well as from Facebook as a corporation, its servers and online platform. In Lazzarato’s words, “subjection manufactures a subject in relation to an external object...of which the subject *makes use*...with which he acts” and mediates the subject’s communication or work with another individuated entity (*Signs* 26). Thinking of my use of Facebook in these terms may be problematic. It can introduce the misleading conclusion that it does not foster the logic of the market and therefore does not imply enslavement—I am having a good time! Lol! However, if we analyse the use of Facebook from a molecular perspective, one that does not focus on individuated and separate entities but rather thinks of their constituent parts as (binary, affective, material-discursive) assemblages, the picture changes dramatically. The individuated user then emerges as a series of digital inputs—meaning data about accesses, online searches history, clicks on advertising banners, likes—managed by algorithms producing revenues for the corporation. The agency responsible for producing this revenue cannot be summarily identified with the human subject clicking on a

banner. This agency is distributed along a machinic network of processes that Facebook, and broadly speaking the market, subjugates (i.e., enslaves) for profit.

The analysis of the apparatus of machinic enslavement makes it necessary to reinterpret the process of social subjection. First, the hyper-individualized conception of the subject and her competitive agency appear now under a totally different light. The subjective capacity to affect and be affected and the conditions for actions and desires to emerge can no longer be attributed to a rationally grounded, autonomous and individuated entity. They belong to a relay that entangles and distributes human and nonhuman agencies along a network. Across this network there is no competition. All its components work towards the same aim—make profit and foster neoliberal logic. Paradoxically, the neoliberal apparatus of machinic enslavement seems to suggest that an alternative ethics and politics, one rooted in (non)human collaboration and cooperation toward a common aim, is possible. Second, the disseminated nature of this modality of subjectivity appears in contradiction with the dichotomous structure of the apparatus of social subjection (subject/object, matter/discourse). In the machinic dimension, these distinctions do not hold any more, as material entities (e.g., bodies, affects, electric energy, molecules) and discourses (e.g., narratives, hierarchies, laws, norms) are all contiguous parts of the same assemblages. Matter, in other words, is a component of the assemblages, as much agential as discourses. Matter does not function as a passive mould, but as an actual agent producing value for the market.

These considerations entail the need to envision forms of opposition to neoliberalism that go beyond the discursive dimension and do more than merely re-elaborate humanist and anthropocentric conceptions of subjectivity. Subversive practices that only counter discursive forms of production of subjectivity will not suffice for enacting an alternative to molecular forms

of control. Neoliberal ideology will progressively reterritorialize these practices as it keeps enslaving the constituent parts of the subject at the molecular level. Bringing about change, therefore, primarily requires a radical and revolutionary shift of perspective. This perspective must be grounded in a post-humanist ethics that takes machinic assemblages as an opportunity to recast our practices and our understanding of the production of political subjectivities. This shift would be ethical and political but also ontological, as we are called to question anthropocentric conceptions of the human and re-think our relationship with technology, the environment and the nonhuman domain from an eco-centric standpoint. This ontological and ethico-political turn, however, must generate a constructive feedback in the discursive domain and ultimately become a theoretical approach that can inform practice at the discursive level. The construction of an alternative to neoliberalism requires a theoretical and practical effort that must conceive of the discursive and pre-discursive dimension as constantly entangled.

### Being and Agency from a Post-Humanist and Eco-Centric Perspective

Karen Barad's post-humanist ontology appears the most suitable theoretical framework for radically rethinking being and agency from a post-humanist and eco-centric perspective. This ontology provides the shift of perspective required for enacting an alternative to the neoliberal apparatuses of social subjection *and* machinic enslavement. Barad develops anti-essentialist, post-anthropocentric and post-humanist definitions of subjectivity and agency. These can help me understand the operations of these apparatuses and consequently investigate the possibility to subvert them and create change. Barad provides the concepts necessary for reaching a deep understanding of these apparatuses, imagining different conditions of emergence of subjectivity, and envisioning ways to put these conditions into practice. Her theory is therefore key to my

exploration of Wu Ming's activism. Her ontology is the backdrop against which I am going to read the evolution of their interventions and the horizon of my journey across Wu Ming's trajectories. Barad's ontology, however, does not represent the pre-determined point of arrival of this study. My analysis of Wu Ming's work through Barad is rather a constant and ongoing questioning about the possibility of a synergistic feedback between theory and practice, between a new philosophical understanding of the way the world is and actions that seek to bring about a different world, between cognition and ethico-political imperatives.

In the course of my analysis of Wu Ming's interventions, I will make use of many of Barad's terminology and concepts. Therefore, it is useful to introduce right away at least some of the most important ones. This will be an opportunity to clarify my use of Barad's terminology and make my analyses more accessible to readers unfamiliar with Barad's theory. I will illustrate here the three key concepts of her ontology: post-humanist agency, entanglement and intra-action.

In Barad's ontology, agency is not an attribute, a codified capacity or power one can possess. It is a doing, an enactment, a quality belonging with the material and discursive configurations of the world and which these configurations performatively enact in their becoming (*Meeting* 178). Agency, in other words, is not a power that pre-exists a subject. Agency is the performative manifestation of this power that does not belong to a subject but to the whole process and its participants. For Barad, agency is not limited to the human domain (*Meeting* 177). These participants can be human and nonhuman, as well as material and discursive, as agency emerges in material configurations of specific set of power relations. Agency stems from the whole process and the entanglements of its participants in it rather than from its components taken singularly as distinct entities. In Barad's ontology, the traditional

boundary between agential subject and passive object blurs, insofar as agency is a manifestation of the material-discursive entanglement of the two. Barad makes a radical move here. In order to define agency, one does not have to postulate the existence of a pre-determined subject and object. Rather, one needs to see these entities in the process reciprocally affecting and being affected by each other. These entities, in other words, are entangled. For Barad, entanglements are not “any old kind of connection, interweaving, or enmeshment in a complicated situation,” but rather the assemblages of material and discursive agencies in which entities are constantly and mutually implicated (160). Barad’s notion of entanglement is indeed similar to what Deleuze, Guattari and Lazzarato call the machinic. She believes that these entanglements are responsible for the production of subjectivity. The entities involved in these entanglements do not inter-act as pre-established and distinct individuals, but *intra-act* and shape each other’s subjectivity. Through these intra-active processes, material and discursive articulations of the world (bodies, molecules, subjects, objects) crystallize and become meaningful (*Meeting* 139).

Barad’s definition of subjectivity is therefore anti-essentialist as it does not postulate any essence behind the subjects’ conditions of emergence. Her definition concentrates on the series of performative enactments that produce the subject as a material-discursive configuration. This definition is post-anthropocentric, because it does not eliminate the possibility for human agency to intervene in the process of production of subjectivity, but articulates this intervention in eco-centric agential entanglements. Finally, it is a post-humanist definition of subjectivity, as it does not bind the emergence of agency to the rational faculty of the mind, but grounds agency in the material and discursive entanglements that produce the world. Rationality, cognition and knowledge are only materially grounded and discursively informed pieces of a more complex material-discursive puzzle whose constant becoming brings about change and reconfigurations.

Barad's definition of subjectivity ultimately embodies a relational approach to agency and the material-discursive phenomena in which it emerges. This approach inevitably complicates the analysis of subjectivity production as it entails considering the multiple and relational factors that partake in its construction. In the context of this study, the complexity of the analysis concerns the operations of neoliberal apparatuses, the interventions aimed to enact an alternative to them, and the power relations in which these processes take place. In order to make sense of these processes, I will need to focus on relations and delimit contexts within which these relations crystallize and become visible to my analytical gaze. Once the boundaries of these contexts are defined, I will be able to draw the cartographies of these relations and map out their articulations. Such a cartographic approach will help me understand the articulations of Wu Ming's interventions against neoliberal apparatuses in the current system of power relations and follow the trajectories of their experiments in the production of alternative relational subjectivities.

### The Methodology and Originality of This Study

This whole study constitutes a cartographic account of Wu Ming's activism. My use of the term cartography here is informed by Rosi Braidotti's methodological definition of the term. For her, "a cartography is a theoretically-based and politically-informed reading of the present" (*Metamorphoses* 2). From my perspective, this cartography allows me to map out the evolution of Wu Ming's positions in the current system of power relations and also reflect upon our current theoretical understanding of what a cultural alternative to neoliberalism consists of. My cartography is grounded in political "exegetical tools"—for instance, a specific definition of neoliberalism. These tools are functional in accounting for Wu Ming's positions "in terms both

of space (geo-political or ecological dimension) and time (historical and genealogical dimension)” (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 2). The combination of spatial and temporal approaches is key for understanding how Wu Ming experiment with and revise their interventions according to the success of the latter in affecting the current system of power relations and bringing change. This study will then draw maps of the power relations in which Wu Ming intervene and “help identify possible sites and strategies of resistance” (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 3) in terms of alternative practices and conceptions of subjectivity.

My cartography will combine the analysis of Wu Ming’s interventions with a theoretical reflection upon the new forms of subjectivity and agency they postulate. The structure of the combination of analysis and theory will not follow the usual pattern of beginning with the presentation of the theoretical framework then followed by the analysis of the corpus. Rather, I will constantly transition between my analysis of Wu Ming’s interventions and theories I need in order to understand them. This more dynamic organization is necessary in order to account for the twists and turns in Wu Ming’s multifaceted activism. This last compels me to constantly renew my theoretical concepts to understand their experiments and the logic in their sequence.

An additional consequence of this organization is that the secondary literature review will not be enclosed in a single chapter but spread throughout the whole study to elucidate issues and topics as they emerge in the discussion. This approach is dictated also by the very wide range of material I am considering. Wu Ming’s interventions are multifaceted and span multiple offline and online media. Therefore, analysing these interventions requires a transdisciplinary approach that encompasses, among others, Political Theory (Chapter 2); Literary Studies and Ecocriticism (Chapter 3); and Media Studies and research in the Digital Humanities (Chapter 4). The literature

review distribution will therefore help sharpen and focus my analysis in each chapter and ultimately produce new knowledge in each discipline.

The timeframe of my cartography and its transdisciplinary approach to the activism of the Wu Ming collective represent its most original aspects. Formed in 2000 and influenced by the Marxist tradition of the Italian extra-parliamentary left, the Wu Ming collective has gained wide recognition in Italy and abroad for their multifaceted activism. The latter includes political rallies, collective writing practices, public performances, transmedia storytelling and, last but not least, a series of experimental historical and non-fiction novels. As Wu Ming are still active and keep innovating their repertoire, the timing of this study is the most suitable for carrying out a preliminary assessment of the first twenty-years of their activism, assessment still missing from the scholarship written in Italian and English. Without any presumption to be exhaustive on this point, this study will however constitute a cornerstone in the scholarship on the collective and represent a seminal contribution to future studies about Wu Ming.

Furthermore, scholarship on the collective has so far specifically focused on their commitment to collective writing practices (Conti; Drake; Paint; Thoburn, “To Conquer”; Vito, *Narrazioni*) or their literary forms of interventions, in particular their historical novels (Amici, “La narrazione”; Benvenuti; Citton; Clivio; Mecchia; Michieletto). Only few scholars have attempted to merge the analysis of Wu Ming’s literary works with their online and transmedia forms of activism (Cacopardi, *Wu Ming*; De Pascale; Masterson, *The Wu Ming*; Patti; Piga, “Comunità”). Yet, these scholars all approach Wu Ming’s multifaceted activism from the perspective of their literary experiments and ultimately reduce it to manifestations of linguistic practices—a point I will investigate more deeply in Chapter 1. This logocentric approach inevitably diminishes the potential of Wu Ming’s material and discursive forms of engagement.



To put it differently, this approach does not generate a comprehensive understanding of how the collective intervenes in contemporary culture by entangling linguistic, material and discursive practices. What is missing, and this study contributes, is a systematic account of the multiple strands of Wu Ming's activism, one that uses transdisciplinary knowledge to understand the peculiar nature of their entangled forms of anti-neoliberal interventions. Areas requiring attention include, for instance, their embodied participation in street demonstrations, linguistic experiments in political manifestos and literary works, and challenges to established norms across transmedia networks. Moreover, the transdisciplinary approach of this study also aims to answer questions about how multiple and different forms of political and cultural engagement can partake in a coherent project and generate change. How can participation in political rallies, literature and forms of online activism collaboratively engender a transformation of current power relations? What is the specific contribution of each of this form of intervention to the coherent project of which they are part? Why is such a project still wagering on literature and its forms of expression in an increasingly visual culture? How does this project bridge online and offline forms of intervention? Answering these complex questions is a challenging task this study commits to and will complete by following the trajectories of one of the most interesting examples of collective activism in contemporary Italian culture.

### Content and Structure of This Study

The first chapter of my cartographic account constitutes a preliminary overview of Wu Ming's interventions throughout the twenty years of their activism. This overview represents a map within a map, a preliminary exploration aiming to organize the vast landscape of Wu Ming's multifaceted activism into sections that would help the reader orient herself. The chapter

arranges Wu Ming's interventions into three territories: streets, literary paths and transmedia networks. Each territory captures a particular aspect of Wu Ming's interventions. The street setting focuses on their engagement in material practices of subversion of neoliberalism. Wu Ming's literary paths account for their use of collective writing practices and linguistic forms of expression for imagining alternative modalities of collaboration and coexistence. Finally, transmedia networks are where Wu Ming put these imagined forms of cooperation into practice, challenge discursive norms—private property rights on cultural content, for example—and design projects that foster forms of collective creation and participation. The chapter temporarily disentangles these three territories and the material, linguistic and discursive practices implemented in them to identify the three main trajectories of Wu Ming's activism. Each of the next three chapters will then enter one of these trajectories, studying how Wu Ming's material, linguistic and discursive practices will progressively entangle across them.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to Wu Ming's participation in the alter-global movement and the demonstration against the 2001 G8 summit in Genoa. Wu Ming's participation in this protest entangles linguistic, discursive and material forms of intervention. They write a manifesto for it, challenge the media discourses that label the movement as a threat, and also physically take part in the rally. I will analyse this entangled intervention through the concept of performativity (Austin; Derrida; Butler, *Excitable*) to demonstrate Wu Ming's primary aim to defy neoliberal ideology by enacting an alternative political subjectivity. The comparison and contrast between the performative language of the manifesto and the practices implemented in the street will reveal the main flaw in Wu Ming's approach on this occasion: their programmatic aim to negatively oppose neoliberal apparatuses at the discursive level without imagining alternative forms of production of subjectivity at the machinic level.

Reflecting upon the possibility to imagine and enact such an alternative will bring Wu Ming to reset their project and experiment with new modalities of engagement with different ethical and ontological grounds. Wu Ming carry out this experimentation within the territory of literature. The literary texts I will analyse in Chapter 3 compose a trajectory in Wu Ming's activism that accounts for their creative and imaginary reflection upon the possibility for developing post-anthropocentric subjectivities, agencies and relationalities. The elaboration of literary forms of expressions is for Wu Ming an opportunity to imagine, experiment with and produce post-anthropocentric narrators, points of view and dialogic exchanges. This elaboration is a process at work in Wu Ming's imagination, but their texts also offer their reader an imaginary experience. Its ultimate aim is to make sense of and understand the machinic dimension of our subjectivity and neoliberal forms of enslavement. I cannot stress the following point enough: these literary texts aim to produce an imaginary and cognitive experience and encourage the reader's apprehension of human and nonhuman relationalities from a politically meaningful post-anthropocentric perspective. The linguistic practices implemented in Wu Ming's literary works, in particular the texts *Il sentiero degli dei* (2010) and *Il sentiero luminoso* (2016), urge the reader to embody this post-anthropocentric ethics beyond the boundaries of the text and engage in material and discursive practices that challenge current forms of exploitation of the environment and its (non)human inhabitants.

Chapter 4 returns to forms of more evidently political engagement and wonders how this post-anthropocentric ethics and ontology can be implemented in a political praxis. The chapter will initially focus on Wu Ming's forms of online activism in their newsletter and blog, *Giap*. I will show how human and nonhuman agencies co-enact the dialogue between the members of the collective and their followers and engender discursive practices that target the tenets of

neoliberal ideology, chiefly private property rights and accelerated life rhythms. The second part of the chapter will analyse a form of intervention that bridges the online and the offline dimensions and situates online dialogic exchanges in a broader transmedia operation of storytelling. In this section, I will study the use of the hashtag #Renziscappa as a tool for organizing offline protests against neoliberal policies in Italy. The discussion will consider how the entanglement of multiple media used for the hashtag campaign, online dialogic exchanges and offline material practices essentially challenge media discourses that identify neoliberal policies as the only possible system of governance. The neoliberal refrain continues to be that *there is no alternative*. To this study, now, the task of investigating how an alternative can possibly be imagined and enacted.

## Chapter 1

### Mapping Wu Ming's Activism: Material, Linguistic and Discursive Forms of Intervention

#### Introduction

The aim of this first chapter is to present the forms of interventions of the writing collective Wu Ming and provide the reader with a cartography of their distribution. Mapping Wu Ming's interventions is necessary to understand how the theoretical reflections of the next chapters originate in and come back to this case study. Wu Ming's interventions are multiple, multifaceted, diverse, constantly in a process of becoming: they operate across different media and yet remain essentially entangled. The complexity of these interventions and their entanglements make it problematic to present and organize them systematically. In order to understand this complexity—without presuming to be exhaustive—I will analyse Wu Ming's forms of intervention through the concepts of practice and territory. These concepts constitute the two axes of my cartography, which are internally ramified in tripartite articulations. With respect to the first axis, I will articulate Wu Ming's interventions in terms of material, linguistic and discursive practices. The terms “matter,” “language” and “discourse” are themselves complex, overlapping, and have been the focus of heated theoretical debates in critical thought. However, the core of their semantic field is fairly intuitive and easily exemplified: participation in a street demonstration is primarily a material practice, writing a novel is primarily a linguistic practice, and implementing collective authorship and “copyleft” policies is primarily a discursive practice. In this chapter, I will use the concepts of matter, language and discourse as heuristic tools that allow me to map out the articulations of Wu Ming's practices. I will elaborate on the

theoretical significance of these concepts and on the contribution that this case study makes in the next chapters, where I will critically analyse Wu Ming's interventions. My second axis is territory. Along this axis, I will focus on three key settings: streets, literary paths and transmedia networks. I would like to briefly clarify the reasons for adopting this analytical grid.

Different articulations of material, linguistic and discursive practices crystallize in each of the three territories that I have identified. The aim of focusing on each territory—and the section dedicated to it—is to draw attention to the set of practices that prevail in that territory and characterize it, while not excluding such practices from the others. In the evolution of Wu Ming's activism, the three territories and the practices that characterize them constantly overlap, converge and generate hybrid encounters that this chapter only preliminarily disentangles. This makes their entanglement and, even more importantly, the evolution and intensification of such entanglements visible.

For instance, the streets I refer to in section 1.1 are the physical setting where Wu Ming's interventions most prominently unfold in their material implications and participatory embodied experiences. Engagement in street demonstrations, performances and hikes are examples of the material practices of intervention that I associate with this territory. Material engagement, however, does not exclude the elaboration of linguistic or discursive practices, like writing manifestos or challenging power relations. Similarly, as I will show in section 1.2, while linguistic practices of intervention are prominent in literary paths, they do not preclude forms of material engagement, like collaborative writing experiences, or discursive interventions that rework the authority of the author or literary canons. Finally, Wu Ming's online and offline interventions in the transmedia networks presented in section 1.3 embody sets of norms and rules that enact specific power relations. Here, Wu Ming's interventions are primarily discursive,

because they appropriate online and offline media in order to establish alternative forms of engagement, participation and, ultimately, power relations. These interventions, though, are linguistic too, as language is Wu Ming's primary instrument of communication in these networks. Further, the instruments and tools that materially support interventions and affect the embodied experiences of Wu Ming and their followers are materially grounded in technological devices.

Defining the three territories as different articulations of practice is also helpful for understanding their relation to the concepts of space and time. Although streets, literary paths and transmedia networks intuitively refer to spatial determinations, I rather conceive of them as chronotopes of Wu Ming's activism that express "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" (Bakhtin 84). Wu Ming's territorial entanglements of material, linguistic and discursive practices are not pre-determined spaces, but territories in a state of constant becoming. My cartography composes them into a genealogy. I understand this genealogy as a constant exploration of alternative territories. That is, alternative relations to times and spaces where neoliberal power relations unfold. While Bakhtin's definition of the chronotope suggests that time "thickens, takes on flesh and becomes artistically visible" (84) through its literary representations, my cartography investigates how Wu Ming's practices engender and bring about different spatiotemporal dynamics, movements and relations that characterize their interventions—projects, actions and experiences—as a constant process of converging and becoming.

### 1.1.1. The Materiality of Streets: “Tenere il culo in strada”

In February 1999, the novel *Q* was published under the pseudonym Luther Blissett. Very few people knew Blissett’s true identity, and the publication triggered an impressive hunt for the author. Created in 1994 and related to the larger Luther Blissett Project (LBP),<sup>3</sup> the pseudonym “was shared by dozens of activists in Italy and other European countries to dupe the press into reporting nonevents, hijack popular TV programs, sell apocryphal manuscripts to publishers, conduct psychogeographic experiments, fabricate artists and artworks, denounce media witch hunts, and author best-selling novels” (Deseriis 129). The hunt ended only a month after *Q*’s publication, when Roberto Bui (initially under the pseudonym Fabrizio P. Bellettati), Giovanni Cattabriga, Luca di Meo and Federico Guglielmi went public and revealed that they were the authors of the book. At the end of the same year, these four members of the Bolognese section of the LBP committed, as they wrote, “seppuku”<sup>4</sup> and declared their intention to leave the Project and start a new experience specifically focused on literary production (Wu Ming, *Giap*, “Fiato alle trombe”).<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of 2000, they founded the writing collective Wu Ming in Bologna and baptised themselves using the new pseudonym followed by a number based on the alphabetical order of their last names: Wu Ming 1 (Bui), Wu Ming 2 (Cattabriga), Wu Ming 3 (Di Meo) and Wu Ming 4 (Guglielmi). Wu Ming 5 (Riccardo Pedrini) would join them in the spring of that same year.

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<sup>3</sup> Luther Blissett was the name of a Jamaican footballer who played for the Italian team AC Milan between 1983 and 1984. The reason for its selection as a pseudonym for the project remain unclear.

<sup>4</sup> In Japanese culture, *seppuku* is an honourable practice of taking one’s own life. It was popular among the men of the military class (the samurai) in feudal Japan. *Seppuku* differs from *harakiri*—the more common term for suicide—because it represents a ritual performed to redeem oneself in case of failure (see Rankin, Andrew, *Seppuku: A History of Samurai Suicide*).

<sup>5</sup> In this study, references to the texts published in the newsletter *Giap* will specify the author (Wu Ming), the name of the newsletter (*Giap*) and the first words of the title (in this particular case “Fiato alle trombe”). In the Bibliography (Primary Sources, Section B), I report the hyperlink to each issue that I quote in the study.



Opening the cartography of the writing collective—programmatically concerned with literary production—with the figure of the street and a focus on their material rather than literary practices of intervention may sound counterintuitive. And yet the slogan “tenere il culo in strada” (which the collective frequently uses to describe their activism and may be imperfectly translated as “keeping your ass on the street”)<sup>6</sup> encapsulates two key points for my cartography. First, it points to the fact that Wu Ming’s very *raison d’être* is political: their activism is driven by the objective of subverting the neoliberal order. Second, from the very get go, Wu Ming considers shared public spaces where bodies (human and, as we shall see, eventually nonhuman) intersect and collide in the primary terrain where this subversion must take place in order to make a difference, be effective, succeed. The need to root the analysis of Wu Ming’s linguistic and discursive practices in the material entanglement between their bodies and the streets as metonym for physical public spaces emerges not only from what they actually do, but also from a close reading of their early writings and programmatic statements, from which I selected the two passages quoted below. In the first, taken from chapter fifty-nine of *Asce di guerra* (2000), the first book authored by Wu Ming in collaboration with Vitaliano Ravagli, the protagonist Daniele Zani is attending a demonstration in Bologna.

Primo pomeriggio: la piazza si riempie. Ci sono i partigiani e quelli del sindacato, la Sinistra Giovanile e le *tute bianche*, con caschi integrali e camere d’aria a mo’ di scudo, e purtroppo anche mentecatti a petto in fuori, fazzoletto sulla faccia, manico da piccone in pugno.

A che servirà mai portarsi in piazza il cosiddetto *stalin*, quando poi non lo sai nemmeno usare ed è la prima cosa che molli per scappare a gambe levate coi celerini

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<sup>6</sup> An example of how the collective uses this expression is this: “Ci piace stare su Internet e tenere il culo in strada, senza soluzione di continuità tra una cosa e l’altra. E ci piace scrivere, raccontare. Che è la condicio sine qua non. Se non scrivessimo storie, non avremmo ragione di stare on the road” (Wu Ming 1, “Wu Ming (ancora)”).

dietro? E poi, trent'anni fa i celerini avevano la cravatta, uniformi di tessuto pesante, scarpe basse, caschi senza paranuca... I lacrimogeni erano barattoli che si potevano prendere in mano e rilanciare al mittente. Oggi ci sono i robocops: paranuca, parastinchi, paragomiti, parapratricamentetutto, e i lacrimogeni sono veri e propri missili che chissà cosa contengono. A che cazzo serve un misero bastone, se non per allestire una patetica auto-rappresentazione, fingersi *uomini veri*, giocare la simulazione dei *duri e puri*? Poveretti. Le *tute bianche* hanno tutt'altra strategia: imbottiture con la gommapiuma o protezioni da sport a contatto pieno, scudi di plastica chiusi *a testuggine*, davanti una muraglia di camere d'aria gonfiate e rivestite di poliuretano. Si fronteggia la polizia e si avanza, niente strumenti offensivi, solo una nuova e più sicura *disobbedienza civile*, con tutte le precauzioni del caso, senza alcun desiderio di martirio. (347–8)

The account of the demonstration and the writing of the chapter, as Wu Ming 1 explains in an interview released in 2001, are inseparable from the personal embodied experiences of the members of the collective.

Il riferimento alle tute bianche è dovuto al fatto che mentre stavamo scrivendo *Asce di guerra* in Italia è scoppiato il movimento... Addirittura un capitolo l'abbiamo scritto mentre eravamo nella testuggine delle tute bianche, tutti imbottiti, con gli scudi e i caschi. C'è stato un convegno dell'OCSE a Bologna, c'è stata una mobilitazione di massa di contestazione a questo convegno, e la mattina del 14 giugno del 2000, ci siamo ritrovati con addosso la tuta bianca e tutto il resto, a fronteggiare uno schieramento antisommossa. C'è stata una pausa di un'ora, un tentativo di negoziato, la polizia ci diceva di retrocedere, noi dicevamo che volevamo

avanzare. Siccome c'era un caldo pazzesco, ci siamo tolti le bardature, ci siamo seduti sui nostri caschi e abbiamo scritto il capitolo. Dopo c'è stata una carica, durante la quale naturalmente non siamo rimasti a scrivere, però abbiamo finito il capitolo la sera, quindi in tempo reale. (Wu Ming 1, “Una giornata”)

Wu Ming are *there*, wearing their white overalls and writing according to the rhythms of the protest. The material temporality of the street demonstration engenders the temporal unfolding of the writing practice that linguistically crystallizes the material and affective dynamics in which Wu Ming members participate.

In the two passages, the street is a space-time dimension where the linguistic practices of the writing collective are essentially entangled with their embodiments. Wu Ming emerge from the streets and always strive to return to the streets. But what does it mean to be politically on the street today? What is the meaning of “tenere il culo in strada” in a world in which politics has become a hypermediated spectacle? This is the challenge that Wu Ming faces and in order to map out the complexity of this challenge it is useful to reflect on a key episode early in Wu Ming’s trajectory: their involvement with the group of the so-called “*tute bianche*.”

#### 1.1.1. Wearing White Overalls

The connection between Wu Ming, the *tute bianche* and my cartographic account of their material forms of political intervention may not be clear to a reader that is not familiar with the evolution of Italian social movements at the end of the twentieth century. In order to facilitate the reader’s understanding of this connection, I will briefly sketch a genealogy of this evolution, which is deeply entangled with the coeval organization of the plural global movement—the so-

called “movimento dei movimenti” (Andretta et al. 35)—against neoliberal institutions and their control of the process of globalization.

Scholars usually identify the birth of this movement with the massive grassroots participation in the protest against the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference held in Seattle in November 1999, although its early manifestations can be dated back to the 1980s (Andretta et al. 30–34). In Italy, the genealogy of the movement and the *tute bianche* can be related to 1990s experiments—including the LBP—that built on the experience of 1970s autonomist countercultural movements. As Wu Ming 1 explains in the same interview quoted above (“Una giornata”), the *tute bianche* emerged from a convergence of different phenomena: the LBP and their interventions against mainstream media; the coordination of north-eastern Italian social centres gathered around the anti-neoliberal principles of *La carta di Milano* (1998); and the diffusion of the practices of resistance and communication of the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN or Zapatista Army of National Liberation) among Italian social activists. The *tute* made their first appearance in 1994, during a demonstration against the clearance of the well-known social centre Leoncavallo, in Milan. Proud of the exploit, the mayor of the city, Marco Formentini, had declared that after the clearing of Leoncavallo, only spectres would circulate in the city. The *tute* subverted this metaphor and appropriated it, symbolically wearing white overalls during the march and populating the city with materially embodied spectres.

After 1994, the *tute* took part in different demonstrations and anti-neoliberal initiatives, among which one may recall the Zapatista march to Mexico City in February 2001 and the marches against the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development meeting in Bologna (June 2000); the International Monetary Fund and World Bank summit in Prague

(September 2000); the Free Trade Area of the Americas summit in Quebec City (April 2001); and the G8 meeting in Genoa (July 2001). Wu Ming physically participated in these demonstrations, punctually coupling their material engagement with narrative accounts of the struggle, which they published in their newsletter, *Giap*.<sup>7</sup> The newsletter also reported heated e-mail exchanges between the members of the collective and their followers, the so-called *giapsters* (*Giap*, “Dibattito” and “Prosegue”), and became a space for activists to discuss, along with the main website of the *tute* ([www.tutebianche.org](http://www.tutebianche.org)) and its mailing lists. Wu Ming’s material and linguistic forms of intervention co-evolved and contributed creative elaborations and critical analyses of protest strategies to the *tute bianche* initiatives.



**Fig. 1. The *tute* at the demonstration against the OECD meeting in Bologna**

<sup>7</sup> I am referring to the following *Giap* issues: “Cronache da sotto la testuggine,” “La battaglia di Praga,” “Dibattito su Praga,” “Prosegue il dibattito su Praga,” “Di ritorno dal Quebec,” “Genova: dal tempo del racconto al tempo del progetto” and “Diario Messicano.” Wu Ming named the newsletter after the Vietnamese general Võ Nguyên Giáp (1911–2013), who successfully led the Viet Minh resistance against colonialist occupants in the 1940s and ‘50s and later in the Vietnam War (1955–75). The general was well-known for his ability to adapt his approach to combat—guerrilla warfare or open-field battle—to the particular goals and settings of each battle. The figure is inspiring for Wu Ming as they strive to replicate the same changeable and multiple approaches in their cultural interventions. See the article “Why Have We Called Our Newsletter(s) After A Famous Vietnamese General?” available at <https://www.wumingfoundation.com/english/giap/whygiap.html>.



Fig. 2. The *tute* in their *testudo* formation

As portrayed in *Asce di guerra*, the *tute* street strategy is simple and based on the need for *defending* one's body from police officers' without *attacking* them (Figure 1). The *tute* cover their bodies with foam rubber, helmets, shin guards; carry broad and squared plastic shields used to create *testudo* formations (Figure 2); and push against police forces using inflated rubber inner tubes covered with polyurethane. The defensive attitude of the group is a materially informed practice that programmatically aims to have discursive repercussions. The *tute* create an active form of physical contestation of power that cannot be classified as violent so as to deconstruct the dichotomy of violence vs. nonviolence that mainstream media uses to criminalize demonstrators. The material deconstruction of this discursive dichotomy succeeded in attracting new social forces and individuals, increasing participation in the movement. Those who were previously afraid of or against being involved in violent struggles with the police—a common

refrain in Italian protests since the 1950s—saw in the *tute* practice a reasonable compromise between embodied presence, engaged activism and nonviolent attitudes.

From my cartographic perspective, the *tute bianche* experience is a laboratory for the members' early experiments with political articulations of material, linguistic and discursive practices of intervention. Informed by the Zapatista's strategies in Chiapas, this intervention consists of being physically present on the road and in the streets in order to enact the social conflict that self-styled neoliberal narratives of the "*pensée unique*" (Ramonet) presume to hide. In opposition to the TINA slogan "There Is No Alternative," coined by Margareth Thatcher, Wu Ming members, as *tute bianche*, physically embody the alternative, creatively enacting forms of resistance that subvert and problematize the way in which mainstream media framed the protests and the containment strategies of police forces. Roads and streets are therefore the stage where the conflict has to be performed in innovative and unpredictable ways: being an active but defensive and nonviolent body. This strategy was successful in obtaining global visibility and putting the needs of marginalized social groups on the agenda of public institutions and international non-representative organizations, thus achieving the most basic political objective of the protest movement.

The 2001 Genoa G8 simultaneously represented the apex and a break in the evolution of the *tute bianche* experimental practices, as well as in Wu Ming members' involvement in this form of intervention.<sup>8</sup> The text, "Dalle moltitudini d'Europa in marcia contro l'Impero e verso Genova," written by the collective before the summit, is widely considered the *tute bianche*'s own manifesto, roaring against the neoliberal leaders meeting in Genoa and calling for the

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<sup>8</sup> The end of Wu Ming's involvement in the *tute* project did not entail the end of their participation in demonstrations and marches. For instance, Wu Ming members strongly supported and promoted the need to march against all wars in the massively attended demonstration of February 15, 2003. Their later engagements in marches and demonstrations were also discussed and analysed on *Giap*, but these forms of intervention were no longer be framed into a specific practice or movement such as the *tute*.

upheaval of all marginalized social groups. However, as I will show in more detail in the next chapter, the language of Wu Ming's text also showed the limitations of the *tute bianche* strategy insofar as it did not do justice to the plural embodied subjectivities marching in Genoa.

Combined with flaws in the organization of the Genoa march and the unexpectedly brutal behaviour of police forces, the manifesto dramatically marks the exhaustion of the potential of the *tute* practices. In my cartography, however, the experience of the G8 and the reflections published on *Giap* in the aftermath of the event do not represent a neat *caesura* in Wu Ming's political commitment to undermining neoliberal ideology, but rather a key moment in their trajectory: a moment that signalled the need for the collective to articulate their material, linguistic and discursive practices in different directions. Wu Ming built on this experience and explored different embodied forms of intervention aimed at bringing about an alternative to the purported hegemony of neoliberal ideology.

### 1.1.2. The Embodiment of Political Imagination

After the experience of the *tute bianche*, Wu Ming's material activism evolves into forms of intervention that explore the re-enacting of embodied political struggle within works of imagination and in the domain of culture. This form of cultural activism by no means dismisses the elaboration of political messages or practices, which the members of the collective increasingly nest within their cultural productions. My cartography maps this terrain by presenting how Wu Ming's performative enactment of an alternative to neoliberal ideology—what they were doing as *tute* in an evident political fashion—informs their exploration of new material forms of engagement closely entangled with the materiality, language and discursive practices of visual and audio media.



An excellent example of this exploration comes from the collaboration between the collective and the director Guido Chiesa in the realization of the film *Lavorare con lentezza*, released in 2004. The film tells the story of Sgualo and Pelo, two young men who live in 1970s Bologna and experience the countercultural life of the student autonomist movement of the time. In particular, through the stories of these characters, the film reflects upon the desires and aims of the movement and focuses on the project of *Radio Alice*, the open-mike radio station that, between 1976 and 1977, interpreted the movement's needs for creativity, free communication and self-organization. The events portrayed in the film include the clashes between students and police forces that took place in Bologna on March 11, 1977, and led to the death of the student Francesco Lorusso. The day after the clashes, the police cleared the apartment where the *Alice* radio station was located, accusing it of playing a role in organizing the student groups involved in the struggles.

My interest in this film lies in the role that Wu Ming and the materiality of their bodies play in its making. The members of the collective wrote the screenplay with the director, so as to experiment with different forms of linguistic practices that, up to that point, had concentrated on narrative texts. These practices do not work on a text that is only meant to be read. They have to programmatically imagine its performative enactment and its articulation in a material dimension. Moreover, as Wu Ming members are present on the set and participate with their own bodies in the scene of the clashes as extras, they personally engage in a performative embodiment of what their linguistic practices instil in the text. Wu Ming's encounter with cinema and its practices therefore constitutes an experiment in the entanglement of material and linguistic forms of intervention: "tenere il culo in strada" no longer means simply being on the street to protest a current situation, but also begins to signify imagining and performing how

other people, on other occasions, were on the street, and then learning from that re-enactment how we might be on the street (more successfully?) in the future.

In their newsletter, Wu Ming published their reflections on the physical experience of being on set. Those accounts make clear the ethical potential of their material forms of intervention. As in the *tute bianche* experience, their bodies in the street are the vectors of a mediated political message, but their previous participation in clashes with the police and the staged re-enactment of 1970s countercultural riots run at two different rhythms. The staged performance, which entails embodying “what is other from me” and belongs in a different context, allows Wu Ming members to enter a space and time of reflection upon their relation to this otherness. This reflection is the path that leads the members of the collective to engage in an experimental encounter with the other. It is an experiment that is primarily imaginary, as they imagine what being a 1970s student would be like, but ultimately cognitive, as they do their best to understand the material and affective composition of their body, their position in a different system of power relations, their relation to the world. This experiment opens their bodies to the others, affects their ethical stance toward it and therefore contributes to their abilities to conceive of alternative ways of being. As Wu Ming 5 writes on *Giap* (“La solita”), after the shooting:

ho provato a reimpostare il mio linguaggio del corpo (nelle scene ho un passamontagna sul volto) in modo da essere credibile nel ruolo di un giovane di venticinque anni fa. I corpi sono cambiati, da allora. L'alimentazione, materiale e spirituale, è differente. Non solo la foggia dei vestiti o la lunghezza dei capelli ... ma anche la materia che andava a costruire ossa e carne e il cibo che nutriva la mente e muoveva il corpo.

Wu Ming's performative embodiment of an alternative to neoliberal ideology entails dealing with otherness and its genealogy, as “un tributo ai precursori, ai fratelli maggiori, a chi ha trasmesso informazioni, saperi e valori” (*Giap*, “La solita”). The otherness that Wu Ming encounter and embody during the staged clashes does not merely relate to the experience of other human beings living in a different time, but also entails negotiating their behavior with the material and discursive practices of film production. As Wu Ming 3 explains,

Sul set ci sono stato acquattato nelle retrovie, in mezzo alle comparse, a sentire l'umore della truppa e sbirciare dentro quel quadratino di monitor che dovrebbe far capire al regista che cazzo sta girando. Vestito anch'io in abbigliamento Seventies da esproprio, pronto a svaligiare un'armeria o innescare *bocce* da tirare a carabinieri amici dei manifestanti. Le comparse ... fanno domande, si annoiano, soprattutto aspettano ... Il cinema visto da dentro è fatto di attese di ore per riprese di pochi secondi, da ripetere tante volte. Perché a un certo punto si gira davvero. E' divertente, ci si stanca, si sbaglia, non sai bene cosa viene ripreso ma sai cosa devi fare. Pochi secondi ripetuti decine di volte, passano così le giornate del cinema ... E i due formidabili armieri romani, responsabili degli effetti speciali? Mi hanno insegnato a caricare un'arma automatica (per esigenze di scena, sia chiaro).

Filmmaking practices have their own needs and “tenere il culo in strada” while participating in the making of a film entails respecting the rhythms and needs of the medium. Wu Ming's encounter with cinematic practices affects their embodied experience and also requires learning processes “per esigenze di scena” that transform this encounter in an opportunity for cognitive apprehension of new actions and approaches.

Along with the writing for and making of films (that Wu Ming 2, in particular, will pursue in later years with the short documentary *51* (2012) and the feature films *L'uomo con la lanterna* (2018) and *Il varco* (2019)), Wu Ming's activism will explore the "avenues" of music and audio media. Wu Ming 1's collaboration with the band The Switters represents an example of this exploration in my cartographic account. He joined the band on stage to "usare la voce e il corpo come strumenti" (*Giap*, "Che fine"), perform and play excerpts from his solo book *New Thing*. The book—a narrative mix of jazz culture and black rights movements in 1960s America—will come out in the fall of 2004, while Wu Ming 1's tour with the band starts in January of the same year, therefore performing and setting to music a work-in-progress text. The author experiments with the linguistic practices that inform the novel *on the stage*, as his body and voice entangle the reading performance with The Switters' sax, drum, bass and voices. The entanglement of material and linguistic practices therefore progressively contributes to engender the style of the novel, characterized by diverse oral forms of expression belonging to a sequence of multiple narrators.

The *New Thing* experiment exemplifies how Wu Ming find a peculiar form of intervention in their voices that articulates material, linguistic and discursive practices. Wu Ming's experimentations with the potential of their voices for embodying and spreading their political messages punctuate their genealogy and constitute their first creative investigations in the territory of transmedia networks, on which I will return later in this chapter.

### 1.1.3. The Street in Literature: Between Language and Practice

The embodied engagement with multiple media discussed in the previous section does not lead Wu Ming away from the street, but rather sets the stage for a thoughtful and far-reaching

return to the urban and natural environment. It is time for my cartography to encompass the practice of walking, which Wu Ming develops as a material form of exploration of and self-engagement in alternative relations with the environment and its history. In recent years, Wu Ming members have organized and undertaken excursions and other forms of embodied intervention across urban roads and hiking paths, often reporting these material experiences in their literary works. This particular entanglement explains why this subsection is situated at the crossroads of the first and second territory of my cartographic account. The aim of these forms of intervention is threefold: performatively experimenting with life rhythms and behaviours alternative to fast-paced neoliberal lives; contesting neoliberal forms of land exploitation; and disrupting the institutional appropriations of urban spaces for the promotion of nationalist, colonialist and fascist values. Wu Ming's activism in relation to the TAV (*treno ad alta velocità*, or high-speed train) project exemplifies each of these goals well.

The recent construction of the Italian TAV transformed the landscape of several Italian regions and the travelers' relation to it. The broad spectrum of institutional private and public interests in the promotion of the railway construction is representative of the neoliberal fever for building, in Wu Ming's words, "Grandi Opere Dannose Inutili e Imposte" (Wu Ming 2, "#GODIImenti"). These huge works embody the connection between economic principles of funding the development of the country—in particular, of private firms colluded with public institutions—with the indiscriminate and unsustainable exploitation of the natural environment. The TAV also emblematically embodies the fast-paced rhythm of neoliberal lifestyles. The traveller's journey across the landscape has to be as fast as possible, taking her from point A to point B as if there were nothing in-between.

Wu Ming contest these economic and social principles and creatively engage in material practices of intervention that performatively enact an alternative to them. These material practices are deeply entangled with their writing practices and linguistic experiments. Wu Ming 2's two books, *Il sentiero degli dei* (2010) and *Il sentiero luminoso* (2016), respectively account for two long excursions that the author did from Bologna to Florence and from Bologna to Milan, along the itinerary of the high-speed railway. Wu Ming 2 answers the call for developing linguistic forms of intervention against the exploitation of the environment, embodying material practices that slow down his (i.e., the human agent's) relation to his surroundings, giving him the time and the opportunity to be surprised by them and allowing him to discover stories about the landscape, its conformation and the damage done to it.

Wu Ming's fight against the exploitation of the environment continues in *Un viaggio che non promettiamo breve: venticinque anni di lotte No Tav*, Wu Ming 1's book about the environmental activism of No TAV movements in the Susa valley. Visiting the valley in Piedmont, hiking across its paths, encountering the activists and living with them, Wu Ming 1 develops a material practice of intervention in which his physical presence becomes the most powerful weapon. The book, however, also contains the author's deep reflections about the linguistic and discursive strategies that the movement—and he himself as author—should adopt in order to challenge neoliberal power relations. For him, the encounter with the valley, the railway construction site and the genealogy of the movement is the situation from which the articulation of material, linguistic and discursive forms of intervention must stem. *Un viaggio* runs across the roads of the Susa valley and the literary paths of Wu Ming 1's linguistic and rhetorical experiments, making the book an account of a shared and problematic creative

experience. I will investigate the full significance and potential of these experiments by Wu Ming 1 and Wu Ming 2 in Chapter 3 of this study.

A genealogical approach to the landscape and the stories it contains also inspire Wu Ming's involvement in the group *Resistenze in Cirenaica*. Cyrenaica is the name of a neighbourhood in Bologna named after the homonymous region in Libya which was an Italian colony from 1912 to 1934, when it was incorporated into a larger Italian colony created under the Fascist regime. The history of the Italian colonization of Libya includes dramatic and shameful practices that mainstream historical accounts have yet to fully acknowledge, among which are bombings, deportations, concentration camps and the use of chemical weapons. The group of *Resistenze in Cirenaica* (RIC, <https://resistenzeincirenaica.com/>) programmatically aims at uncovering these stories and disrupting nationalist forms of appropriation of the urban landscape in and around Bologna and across Italy. The group's first initiative (Figure 3), in which Wu Ming are directly involved, consists of an urban march across the streets that celebrate Italian colonialism—such as, for instance, *via Libia* (September 27, 2015). The goal of this embodied form of intervention is to rename Libya street after the Yugoslavian partisan Vinka Kitarovic (Figure 4), who fought against fascism with the Italian Resistance in Bologna and Modena. Wu Ming and other activists literally paste the street sign carrying the name of the partisan on that displaying its old name. The material practice of walking is therefore deeply entangled with linguistic and discursive forms of intervention that challenge nationalist appropriations of the urban landscape.



**Fig. 3. *Resistenze in Cirenaica*, the walk through Bologna (2015)**



**Fig. 4. *Resistenze in Cirenaica*, the street named after Vinka Kitarovic (2015)**



The substitution of the sign is coupled with acts of storytelling that thicken the articulation of material, linguistic and discursive practices of intervention. The itinerary of the march follows streets named after partisans (like *via Massenzio Masia*), where Wu Ming tell stories about these figures, Libyan resistance fighters—like Omar al-Mukhtār—or the crimes of Italian colonialism. The participants march on the streets for ten hours, alternating movement, steps, rest and reflection. Dwelling on the past of the neighbourhood and its stories is a spatio-temporal experience intimately connected with the physical conformation of the urban landscape—street signs, squares, commemorative plates, monuments. The stories about the Resistance, war crimes and Italian colonialism evoke them as spectres that haunt the urban landscape and the life within it. These ghosts must be faced through the organization of embodied, materially grounded and affectively charged performances (Wu Ming call them “rituali” (“Prontuario”)) that deal with their legacy and propose alternative genealogies or forms of remembrance. Here, from the perspective of my cartography, Wu Ming’s acts of storytelling become material, linguistic and discursive forms of intervention that cross the boundaries of the book and go into the street, dealing with material, discursive and affective appropriations of the landscape.

## 1.2. Literary Paths: Imagining a Different World

We have begun this cartography of Wu Ming’s activism by focusing on the significance of “tenere il culo in strada” and the material practices of intervention that imperative embraces. We have noted how, over time, the meaning of the slogan expands and reaches into the terrain of literary language and transmedia discourse while maintaining its focus on embodied presence and interaction. It is precisely that focus on embodied presence and interaction that shifts in this

section. Here we will consider practices that primarily explore the power of the imagination and seek to wrest with language, in language, and through language, the possibility of imagining a world different from the one projected on our screens by the neoliberal order. Literature plays a pivotal role in this terrain insofar as it makes it possible for Wu Ming to explore and develop an arsenal of subversive linguistic practices that can then be deployed in all Wu Ming's transmedia forms of intervention. As was the case in the previous section, it is useful to begin this reflection by asking a few questions: how is it possible to liberate language and imagine a different world today? What kind of literature can be equal to the task of interrupting the mesmerizing flow of neoliberal narratives? These are the challenges facing Wu Ming. The effort to answer them will involve the articulation of the usual three domains of materiality, language and discourse, which I will explore in turn.

### 1.2.1. Wu Ming: a Pseudonym to Challenge Individualism

The first linguistic practice that my cartography accounts for is Wu Ming's choice of pseudonym. In Mandarin Chinese, Wu Ming may mean *no name* or *five names*, depending on how one pronounces it. The pseudonym literally embodies the programmatic intention of the writers to maintain some degree of anonymity and simultaneously situate their activity in a collective dimension consisting of the constant negotiation and interaction between its individual members. In sum, this is an alternative material practice of writing that undermines the neoliberal myth of the individual genius and proprietor of the literary product. But how can Wu Ming make their different singularities coexist? The collective has explained their writing practices and decision-making process on several occasions. The way they proceed changes constantly

depending on the story they are writing (Wu Ming, *Giap!* 235), never becoming a codified method (Smargiassi).

Usually, at the beginning of a new work, Wu Ming sit around a table and collectively compose a screenplay—similarly to cinematic screenwriters—to define and divide a great part of the plot into sequences (Wu Ming, *Giap!* 235). They then split the research, share the results and each member starts writing and elaborating narrative drafts, sketches. The authors later go around the table, reading these sketches aloud, comparing their different approaches to the story and even making radical modifications.<sup>9</sup> After these first engaging confrontations, Wu Ming split the story in several chapters and assign each of them to one of the members. Each chapter is written individually at the same time, while the writers are in constant contact by e-mail. Finally, all the chapters undergo collective revisions and are read, still around the table, aloud in sequence. The materiality of words' sounds, the authors' voices, their physical presence around the table, as well as the need to constitute a collaborative network in constant contact, inform Wu Ming's writing practices.

These considerations are valid for their collective literary projects—like the novels they sign as Wu Ming—but are also partially consistent with the procedure they follow when they author solo works. Any member of the collective is free to take on individual projects—novels, performances, research—but their autonomy does not consist of a complete isolation or liberty. Every project authored by a member of the collective *is* a project of the collective and, therefore, is shared among the members who can give feedback and suggest modifications. Conversely, if the individual member is willing to sign a project as Wu Ming, he has to obtain the approval of

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<sup>9</sup> For the writing of *Q*, they individually concluded their historical research before composing it, whereas for later novels, the research and the writing were two parallel processes (Smargiassi). Wu Ming 5 took part in the writing of *54* (2002) “dall'esterno, soprattutto con consulenze sulla cultura popolare bolognese,” while *Manituana* (2007) was the first novel written by the entire collective (Wu Ming, *Giap*, “Hasta siempre”).

his *compadres*. As such, Wu Ming members' singular experiments with material, linguistic and discursive practices are entangled with their collective forms of intervention, which stem from the collaborative synergy of singular and cooperative contributions.

What may sound simple is in fact not so. Wu Ming never hide the difficulty of writing collaboratively and elaborating collective practices of intervention. Their strategy and goal is to find what they call “una mediazione al rialzo”—a unanimous agreement that must not be a conciliatory compromise—but rather, the product of their creative leap that resolves the arguments at a higher level (Smargiassi, “Scriviamo”). The need to agree unanimously, however, may cause forms of self-censorship, or worse, defections, like those of Wu Ming 3 and Wu Ming 5, who decided to step out in 2008 and 2015 respectively. According to the group *fahrenheit.it*, who interviewed the members of the collective separately at the end of 2004 and then analysed their answers, although “gli scrittori traggono la loro forza dall’infinita energia dello scontro—incontro di menti differenti” (17), the resolution of the conflicts between them, based on unanimous agreement, is not very democratic (20). Moreover, “ognuno dei membri del gruppo mantiene un’idea personale e in parte discordante da quelle degli altri sulle relazioni interne” (26). Yet, the researchers also claim that these discrepancies reveal a distributed perception of leadership within the group, rather than the accepted acknowledgement of a leader (25). For Gaia de Pascale, Wu Ming members’ interactions consist of operating “continue sintesi tra diverse sensibilità e diverse istanze” and bringing up “ciascuno con i propri mezzi un surplus di competenze” (79). For this process to happen, differences and extremisms are fundamental. They oblige the group to negotiate and mediate the conflict between different perspectives and find, as in a band, a higher result than the sum of its parts (De Pascale 79). As Wu Ming 1 explains in an interview for the blog *20lines*:

bisogna saper leggere il conflitto. Il più delle volte, la divergenza di vedute non è causata da *opposti estremismi*, ma, al contrario, da una mancanza di radicalità: non siamo d'accordo perché non abbiamo osato abbastanza. Se avessimo osato, sicuramente avremmo trovato una soluzione che convince tutto il gruppo ... Il conflitto è un sintomo, e col sintomo bisogna saperci fare.

From my cartographic perspective, Wu Ming's conception of collaborative forms of intervention entails dealing with—and not reducing—their immanent diversity and building on it to propose extreme articulations of material, linguistic and discursive practices. Wu Ming members push each other to imagine the potential of their radical proposals, and yet are available to drop their experimental extremism when it would compromise the existence of the group.

Furthermore, Wu Ming's collaborative writing practices constitute a peculiar form of material intervention that programmatically questions individualistic definitions of authorship. Wu Ming conceive of the author as a relational entity, a vector that channels stimuli, information, ideas and knowledge belonging to society and its “collective intelligence” (Levy 1). They therefore draw on this collective intelligence in order to give their singular contributions to its expansion and enrich it with their individual and collective perspectives. It is not, however, the aim of this cartographic account to discuss the theoretical implications of Wu Ming's conception of authorship. Their methodologies have been both praised (Amici; Piga, “Comunità”; Pischedda; Thoburn, “To Conquer”) and criticized (Cacopardi, “Tra letteratura”; Daros; Paint; Patti), especially in relation to their political messages. The interest of these methodologies for my cartography lies in Wu Ming's constant and self-aware reflection upon the need to propose a conception of subjectivity alternative to neoliberal hyper-individualism and the modalities of its performative enactment. As products of a collective and collaborative process of

interaction, confrontation and negotiation, their interventions in the literary field serve as case studies, allowing me to investigate the conditions for the possibility of this subjectivity to emerge.

Wu Ming's experiments with the enactment of a collaborative subjectivity are not enclosed within the group of members that compose it.<sup>10</sup> These experiments include the organization of multiple collective writing projects supported by online media or platforms. For the first of these projects, the writing of the "romanzo totale" *Ti chiamerò Russell* (2001–02), Wu Ming wrote three chapters out of ten and then selected the others among many proposals sent by email. In 2003, Wu Ming 2 shared the short story *La ballata del Corazza* on [wumingfoundation.com](http://wumingfoundation.com) and opened it to modification by their followers, as if it was an open-source program (*Giap*, "Contro"). Moreover, temporary or longer lasting collectives stemmed from the collaboration between Wu Ming and other writers. An example of the latter is the writing collective *Kai Zen*, which gathers the authors that participated in the *Russell* project. A temporary collaboration was Ermete Treré, a pseudonym used by Wu Ming 2 and the writers Enrico Brizzi and Carlo Lucarelli as a collective author. Ermete wrote the first chapter of a book, later titled *Il sorriso del presidente* (2003–04), and created a blog where he invited users to write the subsequent ones. Then, after a first selection, Ermete asked the users of the blog to choose the next chapters, except for the fourth, the seventh and the last, for which no selection was made and any contribution received was reported as a potential ending to the novel.

From the perspective of my cartography, these collaborative projects enact a series of encounters between Wu Ming members and other authors, and even between these other authors,

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<sup>10</sup> After *Asce di guerra*, the members of the group collaborated with external authors in several collective writing projects, some of which I have already mentioned—*Ti chiamerò Russell* (2002), *La ballata del Corazza* (2003), *Il sorriso del presidente* (2004)—and to which one must add *La Potenza di Eymerich* (2004), *La prima volta che ho visto i fascisti* (2005), *Tifiamo asteroide* (2013), *Tifiamo Scaramouche* (2014).

that are ethically meaningful. The materiality of online tools (a combination of hardware and software components) enables the production of texts that result from forms of communication—in its etymological sense of sharing—with others and their alterity. These online projects, however, confine these forms of communication, and consequently their ethical potential, within the boundaries of the text and the linguistic practices related to its writing.

As of 2013, Wu Ming will increasingly transform these online experiences into local writing labs. In my cartographic presentation of these collaborative projects, the transformation signals Wu Ming's ethical need to entangle these linguistic practices of communication with embodied encounters with alterity, shared material experiences and a more self-aware approach to the discursive implications of collective creation. In the labs, participants are asked to theoretically reflect on the methodologies of collective writing, methodologies that, as discursive practices, defy individualist models of authorship and creation. Moreover, the participants are also invited to put these reflections into practice. They work in small groups on a specific theme—history (*Cantarchivio*, 2013), the environment (*Scrittura fluviale*, 2017), labor (*Metamente*, 2015) or intercultural exchanges (*Al di là del mare*, 2017)—and engage in physical experiences related to it. In the lab *Cantarchivio*, for instance, the participants were asked to look at, read and touch historical documents or objects, speculating about their origin, while the lab *Scrittura fluviale* included a walking trip along the bank of the Adda River and its historical industrial sites. The interaction between the participants' bodies and the environment, the constant materially grounded confrontation these experiences enact, widens the horizon of the encounter with others, the ethical potential of these experiences and their cognitive impact on the participants' understanding of alterity. Linguistic practices of collaboration are therefore coupled

with material and discursive forms of engagement with the matter of the writing act, which does not only produce a text, but more complex sets of ethical and cognitive performances.<sup>11</sup>

Collaborative practices, nevertheless, account for only part of the political nuances of the pseudonym. The collective also chose Wu Ming as its own name because Chinese dissidents use the pseudonym to sign their statements and conceal their identity from the authorities (Wu Ming, *Giap!* 245). The names of Wu Ming members, however, have been publicly known since 2000 and, therefore, their use of the pseudonym seems to contradict its basic function. Let me unpack this only apparent contradiction. Since the formation of the collective, Wu Ming have constantly been present and in contact with their followers both in the online and offline world, where book launches, conferences, performances and presentations give their readers the opportunity to meet the authors physically, hear their voices and see their faces. As they state in their declaration of intent, written in January 2000, their aim is “essere presenti, ma non apparire: trasparenza di fronte ai lettori, opacità verso i media” (*Giap!* 246). On the one hand, Wu Ming build their relationship with their readership on honesty, accountability, mediated and physical interaction and remain transparent to it. On the other hand, they use the pseudonym in the media system as a programmatic critique to the cult of personality and forms of adulatory celebration (Wu Ming, *Giap!* 245).

Being consistent with this critique, Wu Ming members refuse to appear on television or show their faces in any public picture, online and offline. They programmatically do that to contrast the obsession for celebrity and media attention that berlusconism spread in Italian society (Masterson 3, 9). Their early motto, “this revolution is faceless,” and the picture that symbolically portrays the five members as dancers whose faces have been cut (Figure 5),

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<sup>11</sup> The writing lab projects published collections like *GODImenti* (2014), *Meccanoscritto* (2017) and, in collaboration with the association Eks&Tra, *Intrecci* (2012), *Un passo dopo* (2014), *Mari & Muri* (2015) and *Dall'altra parte del mare* (2018).



meaningfully represents the need to actively engage in the creative construction of alternative social relations, yet from a discursive position that does not accept the commodification of the body and its face. The pseudonym and its visual representations, therefore, *stage* a conflict between anonymity and celebrity in order to spark a discussion about the media fetishization of bodies and criticize the neoliberal logic of spectacle (Debord). The pattern that emerges here is similar to the one we encountered in the “tenere il culo in strada” strategy, though the polarity is now reversed: there, a primarily material practice was nourished by discursive and linguistic explorations, while here, a primarily linguistic/literary practice is energized through a material reconfiguration of the process of production.



Fig. 5. Wu Ming, this revolution is faceless

### 1.2.2. A New Linguistic Arsenal to Challenge Mainstream Historical Accounts

Wu Ming's collaborative writing practices produced a series of literary works that belong to different genres, ranging from historical novels to dystopian narratives and non-fiction novels. Indeed, the tendency is toward hybrid entities whose genre is not identifiable, and which Wu Ming eventually described as "Unidentified Narrative Object" (UNO).<sup>12</sup> The stories contained in these works analyse the dynamic of power relations in past and present social conflicts, as well as deconstruct and challenge mainstream accounts of these struggles, telling stories from the

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<sup>12</sup> Given the problematic genre classification of Wu Ming's works, their oeuvre can be divided into three categories depending on their authorship: one including works signed by the entire Wu Ming collective; one for those authored by Wu Ming members individually; and one for books produced through a collaboration between the collective, or some of its members, and authors external to it (see also note 3). *Asce di guerra* (2000), the first book published by the collective and written in collaboration with Vitaliano Ravagli, is a mix of fiction, historiographic essay and autobiography which represents the first experiment of the UNO formula on which Wu Ming will focus more intensively only after 2014.

Between 2002 and 2014, Wu Ming authored several historical novels: *54* (2002), set in 1954, *Manituana* (2007), about the American War of Independence, *Altai* (2009), built around the clash of the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire in the battle of Lepanto (1571), and *L'armata dei sonnambuli* (2014), which is set in eighteenth century France in the Termidoro phase of the Revolution (1793-95). The group also wrote several short stories, some of which were published in 2011 in the collection *Anatra all'arancia meccanica* and *L'invisibile ovunque* (2015) UNO, which gathers four stories written individually by each member and set during the years of WWI. The short novel *Previsioni del tempo* (2008), already mentioned, is about environmental issues, while *Grand River* (2008) reports the impressions of a trip that Wu Ming 3 and 5 took to North America in 2007. Wu Ming also wrote two books thought and designed for children: *Cantalamappa* (2015) and *Il ritorno dei Cantalamappa* (2016). More recently, in *Proletkult* (2018), the collective created a hybrid of historical and science fiction narratives, setting an encounter between humans and aliens in the years that followed the Russian Revolution.

The works authored individually by the members of the collective reflect the variety of their interests and the fields where each of them feels the need to commit the most. Wu Ming 5 signed the first "uscita modulare" (*Giap*, "A che punto") of the collective in 2001, with the visionary tale of *Havana Glam* (2001). Then, before leaving the group, he also published the dystopian *Free Karma Food* (2006), while the signature of *Ms Kalashnikov* (2016) as Wu Ming 5 was contested by the rest of the collective. After *New Thing*, Wu Ming 1 explored the history of the Italian North-East in *Cento anni a nord-est* (2011), where political neo-fascist movements were carrying out an ideological appropriation of historical narratives related to WWI, Fascism and WWII. More recently, Wu Ming 1 told the history of the NO TAV movement, publishing the UNO *Un viaggio che non promettiamo breve* in 2016, and worked on the lives of confined anti-fascists in *La macchina del vento* (2019). After the novel *Guerra agli umani* (2004), about environmental issues and sustainable lifestyles, Wu Ming 2 focused on these themes and composed the two stories *Il sentiero degli dei* (2010) and *Il sentiero luminoso* (2016), connected projects related to the effects of massive construction works on the landscape. Finally, Wu Ming 4 focused on the figure of Thomas Edward Lawrence, protagonist of *Stella del mattino* (2008), and John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, also present in the novel as a character. Wu Ming 4 wrote several essays about Tolkien's writings and its contemporary interpretations, like *Difendere la terra di mezzo* (2013). In 2016, he also published the children's book, *Il piccolo regno*.

Besides the already mentioned productions published with members external to the collective, one must recall the UNOs *Timira* (2012), written by Wu Ming 2 and Antar Mohamed, and *Point Lenana* (2013), written by Wu Ming 1 in collaboration with Roberto Santachiara. They deal with the history of fascism, its legacy and the consequences of Italian colonialism. They also mark Wu Ming's 2014 shift from an experimental approach to the historical novel as a genre to a more intense commitment to UNOs.

point of view of marginal communities or subaltern subjects, like the Mohawk nation and its members in the historical novel *Manituana* (2007). Its account of the American War of Independence is told from the perspectives of Indigenous peoples that fought with the British against the American rebels. These perspectives illuminate how the Americans' struggle for freedom, independence and protection from natives' attacks—as the war is usually portrayed—entailed the erasure of cultural experiments of constructive cohabitation between western settlers and natives.

Wu Ming build these narratives around multiple points of view, at times sympathetically, like in the example of the War of Independence, but never reducing the complexity of historical accounts to unifying or conciliatory interpretations. As Manuela Piga argues, in *Manituana* “il punto di vista narrativo sembra sottrarsi a qualsiasi definizione etica o morale” (“Una storia” 4), alternatively belonging to American military leaders and settlers or members of the Mohawk nation. The novel does not define a clear cut between *good* and *bad* historical sides:

gli atti crudeli ed efferati sono compiuti da entrambe le parti, e fin dall'inizio il gioco dei punti di vista non esita a mostrarci il carattere padronale e colonialista del clan dei Johnson [the family that owns the land where some Mohawk people live].

L'immagine d'insieme sembra allora restituire una riflessione più ampia su una fase storica segnata dalla violenza, nella quale sta per non esserci più spazio per una cultura meticcica e accogliente dove le danze scozzesi degli highlands potevano intrecciarsi ai riti dei mohawk. (Piga, “Una storia” 5)

Dealing with this complexity is fundamental for understanding the plurality of potential developments contained in history: all the *what-ifs* that punctuate it, the possibility for alternative past genealogies and their prospective futures.

Wu Ming's linguistic practices of investigation into these genealogies are the result of a self-aware and programmatic theoretical reflection upon the potential for these historical accounts to constitute a discursive form of intervention in the present, both from a political and ethical perspective. For Wu Ming, literary and storytelling practices constitute political acts that are informed by the collective's ethico-political stance against neoliberalism. These practices are endowed with a subversive ethos that they enact as constituents of Wu Ming's interventions. These practices are experiments through which Wu Ming intervene in the current system of power relations in order to change it. Further, as experiments, they feed back on the strategy of the collective according to the results and responses they trigger.

The collective, however, does not reduce literature and storytelling, and the responses they engender, to be functional to politics (Wu Ming, *Giap*, "Luca" and "Quello"). Wu Ming conceive of these political actions as mythopoiesis: as creative praxis having an effect on the present readers' political, social and ethical imaginary. Wu Ming's historical investigations deal with the complexity of marginal communities' struggles against dominant power relations in order to stress their continuity and envision a possible alternative, both in their historical contexts and in the present. In Wu Ming's project, these historical accounts have an allegorical function: the authors and their readers can use them to interpret the present, imagine its future developments and design the linguistic, material and discursive practices that can bring change now. Imagination, in other words, is the key for the development of subversive practices in the present. This development, I argue, takes both an ethical, cognitive and political direction. The encounter of the reader with the marginal communities and their standpoints constitutes an imaginary confrontation with their alterity and opens a space of possibilities within the reader's knowledge of established narratives of the past. The goal of these subversive narratives is not,

however, to produce scientific knowledge of the past, but rather point at the existence of an alternative to mainstream accounts. The reader's reflection upon this alternative is essential for envisioning the possibility of a change in the present and the creation of a political praxis aimed at bringing this change about.

Wu Ming's choice of fostering change through the practice of mythopoiesis is strategic, as it allows them to appeal for the imaginary, cognitive *and* affective involvement of their readers. The reading experience engenders affects that inform the reader's encounter with others and therefore shape her ethical relation to alterity. These affects, moreover, are also fundamental for desiring, and ultimately producing a new understanding of this alterity and political change. Affective energy is, to put it differently, a fundamental component of one's ethico-political stances and agency, a component that Wu Ming's practice of mythopoiesis strategically stimulates in order to foster the creation of an alternative to the neoliberal order.

Wu Ming's practice of mythopoiesis aims at emotively affecting their readers. Since it includes linguistic tools that reveal its own constructiveness, it also calls for readers' cognitive commitment. Wu Ming novels and UNOs are characterized by a final section—titled “Titoli di coda” or credits—where the authors list their bibliographic references and explain how they selected and used them. The “Titoli di coda” section asks readers to approach Wu Ming's narratives critically and not to passively identify with their interpretations of history. The credits demonstrate that the literary work is the result of a collective research and account for Wu Ming's position in the discourse that this research re-creates. The genealogy of this position is offered to the reader to be discussed, challenged and revised. Readers, in other words, are not asked to dogmatically embody the myths that Wu Ming's linguistic practices engender, but

rather appropriate them and make them their own source of inspiration for the elaboration of individual and collaborative strategies of intervention in their future.

### 1.2.3. The New Italian Epic: Towards a New Idea of Literature

The synergy between Wu Ming's linguistic practices and theoretical reflections on their political and ethical potential opens a new path in my cartographic account, whose signpost is the New Italian Epic. I name this signpost after the title of the essay *New Italian Epic*, which was written and published on the website of the collective by Wu Ming 1 in April 2008. The essay and its heated reception by Italian literary critics, scholars and authors triggered one of the most engaging literary debates in the history of contemporary Italian literary studies. Actively engaged in the debate, and responding to critiques and welcoming suggestions, Wu Ming 1 revised the online version of the essay twice. It was then published on paper in February 2009, in a book containing two other contributions: "Noi dobbiamo essere i genitori" by Wu Ming 1, and "La Salvezza di Euridice" by Wu Ming 2. This book provides key insights into the evolution of Wu Ming's understanding of their own literary practice and in the model of interaction between literature and literary criticism they proposed.

In "New Italian Epic" (NIE), Wu Ming 1 seeks to register a common narrative attitude in Italian literary works published between 1993 and 2008. According to Wu Ming 1, these works reject the late postmodernist distrust and disenchantment towards the referentiality of the word and return to believe in its ability to affect reality and intervene in historical processes ("NIE" 24, 64). NIE works seriously engage with history, be it the sixteenth century of German peasants' wars in *Q*, or the recent political scandals in 1990s Italy, like in *Nelle mani giuste* by Giancarlo De Cataldo. These texts are epic because "riguardano imprese storiche o mitiche,

eroiche o comunque avventurose ... sempre all'interno di conflitti più vasti ... sugli sfondi di crisi storiche, catastrofi, formazioni sociali al collasso" (Wu Ming 1, "NIE"14). They programmatically deal with the power relations that structure the history of society and analyse them in order to understand them, intervene and foster change.

By embracing a more responsible and ethically engaged relation to language and history, this new literary attitude initiates a collective research of alternative social relations through a re-imagined encounter with others. Wu Ming 1 identifies a diverse set of linguistic experimental practices through which this collective research for alternatives is enacted. These include the technique of "sguardo obliquo," that is, the innovative explorations of unexpected, marginal or nonhuman points of view ("NIE" 26), and a "hidden" subversion of language and style whose complexity does not undermine its readability ("NIE" 33, 37). NIE works also use "in maniera creativa e non meccanica gli stratagemmi narrativi della *genre fiction*" ("NIE" 33), but they also go beyond genre definitions and, becoming UNOs like *Gomorra* by Roberto Saviano, hybridize different materials, historical documents, pictures, news articles, interviews, in order to reach their ethical goal and tell stories "nel modo che si ritiene più giusto" ("NIE" 42). These stories, immanently hybrid but also constantly elaborated by readers, online and offline, assume a transmedia dimension, which spreads their messages across different media, multiple forms and heterogeneous audiences. NIE stories, therefore, rely on the creative potential of the reading experience. However, the subversive ethos that informs those stories bridges this potential with creative practices that only a synergy between the literary text and other media—beyond the boundaries of the former—can enact.

It seems to me that the essay *New Italian Epic* describes and proposes a specific idea of literature: one that is fully aware of its ethical, cognitive and creative potential and that

implements this potential in order to intervene in the current system of power relations and produce new imaginaries, subversive practices and change. What distinguishes Wu Ming's essay from their other literary forms of intervention (e.g., their novels)—which by all means align with that proposal—is the attempt to investigate how literary theory and criticism can contribute to practices and/or projects that play a role in bringing about change. The book *New Italian Epic* is an attempt to broach this debate and foster a different kind of interaction between literature, literary criticism and ethico-political practices. Wu Ming's essay illuminates the possibility for critics to consider the text as an experiment, a moment in a larger horizon of material, linguistic and discursive practices of subversion that spread across multiple media and therefore make textual boundaries more porous. The problem from my point of view is that critics did not see this possibility and the debate remained too narrowly focused on what could be accomplished within the boundaries of the text rather than opening them up. It is therefore interesting for me to analyse only two clusters of this debate: those contributions that elaborated on the ethical significance of NIE works; and those that reflected upon their performative conceptualization of language in its literary and transmedia ramifications.<sup>13</sup>

The first cluster of the debate I will review is concerned with the possibility for NIE works to produce a significant ethical experience for the reader and engender a post-

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<sup>13</sup> My analysis will not discuss the legitimacy of choosing an English label for describing an Italian phenomenon, the exhaustiveness of the list of works that Wu Ming 1 includes in the NIE (Scarpa), or its debts to postmodernism (Pincio; Boscolo, "The idea"; Di Martino; Magini and Santoni). These points, except for the third, do not add anything to the debate. Particularly, the second misunderstands Wu Ming 1's intention, which is not to write a programmatic manifesto, but to make a proposal which can become the occasion for writers and critics to confront each other and make a common effort in understanding the complexity of a literary phenomenon. Moreover, it is not useful for my purposes to question whether the adjective Epic is appropriate (Magini and Santoni; Spinazzola, "La riscoperta") and I do not investigate the connections between NIE works and the Italian epic tradition (Boscolo, "Scardinare"; Vito, "Epica"; Biasini; Casadei; Giovannetti; Spinazzola, "La riscoperta"). Also, for the purposes of my argument, it is not necessary to analyze how the reflections on *New Italian Epic* entered the broader confrontation about the return to realistic aesthetics in Italian contemporary literature. Initiated by a special issue of the journal *Allegoria* in 2008 (Donnarumma, Policastro and Taviani), this confrontation triggered the organization of several conferences and consisted of several publications (Cortellessa et al.; Serkowska; Boscolo, "Overcoming"; Spinazzola; Ferraris; Somigli).



anthropocentric encounter with nonhuman entities. Wondering how to represent others, questioning mainstream narratives and multiplying the voices and the points of view of the narration (Piga, “Metahistory”), NIE works pose “the urgent question of what type of relationship exists between our world and us” and express the urgent need to go beyond anthropocentrism (Defilippi). However, if the aim of “sguardo obliquo” is to make the reader identify with (non)human others, one should be skeptical about the resulting points of view assigned to inanimate entities, “proprio per il fatto che l’empatia richiede che il suo oggetto sia senziente” (Pardi). Drawing on Lacanian theory, Caroline Zekri criticizes the assumption that a human being, which finds in verbal language its privileged expression, is able to adopt a nonhuman gaze (201). The former would inevitably be biased by an “ostacolo cognitivo” (196): the choice of relying on representationalism and narrative, two instruments that the “sistema mediatico-spettacolare” has already incorporated (201). For Zekri, the solution is to acknowledge the limits of the human gaze, “ricorrendo ad esempio alla formulazione di ipotesi” (201), or pushing “il processo di rappresentazione dell’immagine fino all’annientamento della sua capacità di rappresentazione, rendendo così manifesti i limiti della rappresentazione” (204). While I personally agree with Zekri’s proposal to abandon representationalist paradigms, I contest her deconstructive (and resonant with avant-gardistic claims) approach that does not offer a real solution to the problem. A story told from the point of view of a pigeon (see Chapter 3 in this study) does not presume to represent a perspective that exists outside of the text in its essence and the reader can fully embody. The story creates a relation between the point of view of the reader and that of the pigeon, in order to make the former encounter the latter and point at the possibility to perceive the world differently, and not exclusively from an anthropocentric

perspective. The text does not represent this relation, but it produces, engenders and enacts it with the collaboration of the reader.

My cartography is grounded in a performative conception of language, which I understand as praxis, rather than a referential instrument. The linguistic performativity of NIE texts is an issue that has been discussed in the second cluster of the debate I am interested in. I share the position of some of the critics that engaged in the debate, according to whom NIE works—similarly to myths—use stories to catch the complexity of the real and rely on “un raccontare...che mette in moto un’azione: un sapere performativo” (De Michele, “Afferrare”). The text, in other words, is an opportunity for the reader to carry out a cognitive and ethical performance (Bolongaro, “Between” 33). This process has to be understood as an exploration, a set of encounters that question anthropocentrism and its rhetoric. Experimenting with “sguardo obliquo,” NIE narrators are often reduced to “un dispositivo ... perfettamente coincidente con un punto di vista. Una non-persona, una pura angolazione extra-umana” (Fulginiti, “Aedi” 5): a “de-umanizzazione” which “mobilita anche il linguaggio, ad esempio nelle metafore che de-realizzano il racconto” (Fulginiti and Vito 25), but cannot be reduced to it. The NIE faith in the power of language is “pur sempre provvisoria, e tutt’altro che trionfalistica” (Fulginiti, “Aedi” 5), and may endow works like *Manituana* with a sense of incompleteness that encourage the reader to act and carry on their ethical search outside of the text (De Pascale 85). According to Tiziano Scarpa, this power and ethical search must be grounded in the establishment of an ethical relationship between the body and the name of the author—that empower their speech acts—and the reader (13). As this position links the linguistic practices of the text with the material practice of storytelling, it is largely agreeable for me. However, this performative and ethically engaged writing must not be reduced “al minimo comune denominatore dell’esperienza personale”

(Pispisa) and must not engender celebratory appraisals of the authorial figure. The performativity of NIE storytelling practices calls for the emotive complicity of the reader, transforming autofiction into a common experience of reflection (Benvenuti 70). It also stimulates a critical approach to narrative content and forms in order to initiate a conflict with the storytelling practices exploited by the mainstream (Tabard 11; Amici, “Urgency” 14). NIE narratives fragment the narration in different points of view that problematize each other. They hybridize different materials within the text, ask the reader to step out of it (Palumbo Mosca 165) and bring the conflict beyond its boundaries into a transmedia dimension contained within the current system of power relations.

My review of the NIE debate showed that only some of the contributions followed up on Wu Ming’s attempt to portray the text as an experimental stage in a larger set of practices aimed to produce change. Even among those who acknowledged the ethical potential of NIE literary practices, only few voices made an effort to bridge linguistic experiments with material and discursive forms of intervention. My cartography breaks out of the text in order to take into account the complex and ramified nature of the transmedia strategies that the collective implements in order to bring about change. While Wu Ming’s journeys across literary paths focus on linguistic practices, these journeys do not disregard the need to “tenere il culo in strada” and spread through transmedia networks in the organization of collaborative initiatives.

### 1.3. Transmedia Networks

Ever since, the experimentation with transmedia forms of interventions has characterized Wu Ming’s articulations of material, linguistic and discursive practices. These interventions run across multiple online and offline media, creating synergies that my cartography investigates in

more detail in Chapter 4. Here, I will map the transmedia articulations of Wu Ming's activism in order to contextualize the discursive practices that foster their circulation of cultural content across transmedia networks (3.1), and the creation of multiple opportunities for followers' participation in the collective's linguistic and material forms of intervention (3.2).

### 1.3.1. Making Content Circulate Across Media

My cartography of transmedia networks starts with the offline dimension. Wu Ming's activism has encompassed reading, musical and filmic performances that cut across different media. While their books, bodies, voices, faces and musical instruments intervene primarily in the offline cultural and political space, these activities also constantly develop ramifications online. In the early years of Wu Ming's activism (until 2009) their website, <https://www.wumingfoundation.com>, is the online repository for all their multimedia activities, including texts, images and podcasts that record Wu Ming's interviews, presentations and performances. All this content—including the texts of their novels, published by the publishing house Einaudi—is available on their website for free download and without any copy-right restriction.

While the use of Wu Ming's content is not regulated by copy-right, they do not release their cultural productions under open-source licenses—that, as it has been argued about the software industry, allows for its commercial exploitation (Söderberg)—but circumscribe the possible forms of fruition of their content using copy-left policies.<sup>14</sup> These policies prevent users from using the protected content for commercial purposes and profit from it. Besides implementing these policies, Wu Ming engage in militant initiatives of knowledge diffusion

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<sup>14</sup> All content published by the collective in digital or paper form report the following sentence: “Si consente la riproduzione parziale o totale dell’opera ad uso personale dei lettori e la sua diffusione per via telematica purché non a scopi commerciali e a condizione che questa dicitura sia riprodotta.”

aimed at mobilizing users against restrictive copy-right laws. The basic tenet of their militancy is the belief that culture does not belong to any of the agents that contribute to making, distributing and sharing it, and therefore should not be commodified. Consistent with this tenet, the collective argues for the right for users to reproduce and distribute cultural content so as to undermine its control by cultural corporations. For Wu Ming, illegal reproduction, copy-left licenses and peer-to-peer practices are discursive forms of re-appropriation of the processes of production and consumption of cultural content that construct an alternative within the corporate system (*Giap*, “Per non”).

From the perspective of my cartographic account, Wu Ming’s implementation of copy-left policies is a discursive practice of intervention that challenges the capitalist privatization of cultural content and intellectual products. Furthermore, Wu Ming do not merely implement these policies, but call for their audience’s conscious participation in enacting an alternative system of economic relations. As one copies, circulates, modifies, rewrites or simply downloads Wu Ming’s content, one blurs the corporate boundaries that divide producer, distributor and consumer, performatively putting the principle behind copy-left licenses into practice. Wu Ming’s implementation of copy-left licenses is therefore a discursive form of intervention collectively performed by a combination of multiple agencies that enact alternative relations to neoliberal forms of exploitation.

Having said that, the possibility for copy-left policies to undermine the capitalist logic of production, distribution and consumption of cultural content is more nuanced and complex than it may appear from this preliminary presentation. I will return to this issue and explore its complexity in the next chapters. For the moment, suffice it to say that Wu Ming’s experiments with copy-left policies do not situate the territory of transmedia networks *outside* capitalism or

its neoliberal articulations. Paradoxically, Wu Ming *is* a trademark, a brand (Muchetti 192) that takes advantage of marketing strategies (Cacopardi, “Tra letteratura” 1). The collective’s responses to those who criticize their ambiguous position with respect to these strategies reveal it to be the result of a conscious, self-aware and programmatic self-positioning within the system of neoliberal power relations. They portray themselves as “una bottega artigiana...un atelier di servizi narrativi ... un’azienda che finanzia e promuove progetti di sabotaggio al capitalismo!” (*Giap*, “Fili”). The aim of Wu Ming is to undermine capitalist logic from within, “stando ben dentro l’industria dei contenuti, però secondo un profilo straniato e polemico” (Pischedda 70).

The reach of Wu Ming’s activism and their explorations of roads, paths and networks do not presume to be able to get *out* of the current system of power relations. Instead, they aim to create an alternative from *within*: that is, discursively appropriating media practices and enacting different relations of production, distribution and consumption of cultural content.

### 1.3.2. Interactivity, Participation, Transmedia Storytelling

While the website [wumingfoundation.com](http://wumingfoundation.com) constitutes the archive of all content Wu Ming produce, the newsletter *Giap* fosters its circulation and periodically connects the members of the collective with their followers. Wu Ming’s implementation of the newsletter, however, does not make it a medium that merely broadcast content for a passive audience. *Giapsters’* messages to the authors are often included in the newsletter or in dedicated specific issues. The inclusion of these messages generates lively and heated discussions between the collective and their followers, who are still limited by the level of interactivity and participation afforded by the medium. These discussions are concerned with, among other themes, Wu Ming’s modalities of implementation of the medium, and therefore intervene in structuring the interactive and

participatory relations between the subscribers of the newsletter.<sup>15</sup> The online synergy between *Giap* and the website therefore allows Wu Ming and the *giapsters* to interact and share content. However, as I map the evolution of Wu Ming's interventions in transmedia networks, I detect their experimental attempts to improve and multiply the possibilities for their followers and themselves to interact, share content, and for the former to participate in the Wu Ming's forms of intervention.

The first experiments that my cartography encounters are the website that the collective dedicates to the film *Lavorare con lentezza* and the section of [wumingfoundation.com](http://wumingfoundation.com) about the book *New Thing*. These are the first spaces where Wu Ming's followers—readers and spectators—can leave comments, address each other or join forum discussions. At the beginning of 2005, Wu Ming acknowledge that they are differentiating communicative spaces and instruments, leaving a central role to the newsletter (*Giap*, “Non qualunque”). This differentiation increases in the following years and particularly since 2010. Wu Ming create an account on Youtube in 2006 and join Twitter and the literary community of Anobii in 2009, while also having a blog specifically dedicated to *Altai*. Meanwhile, the newsletter *Giap*—with more than twelve thousand subscribers at the end of 2009—becomes a blog. It is inaugurated in the spring of 2010 and takes over the pivotal role for Wu Ming's online presence. On the blog *Giap*, Wu Ming's works are uploaded and shared as they were on the website, which, in 2015, is turned into an archive of the collective's previous production.

Wu Ming's dissemination across multiple online media—in particular, the transformation of *Giap* into a blog and the opening of their Twitter account—enhances the opportunities for their followers to interact with the authors and actively participate in the initiatives promoted

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<sup>15</sup> Here, the reference is to the following *Giap* issues: “Non comincia adesso,” “Nobody,” “Attraversare,” “We Won't,” “No strunz,” “Il signor Ming,” “No teneis huevos a contestarme,” and “Futuro di Giap, Saviano, eBay, video.”

through these media. They did this, for instance, through blog discussions or hashtag campaigns. Wu Ming's experiments with online media, however, explore the possibilities for their users to participate in a common and collaborative storytelling practice. The collective writing projects I referred to in the previous section—*Ti chiamerò Russell*, *Il sorriso del presidente*—constitute the earliest examples of Wu Ming's implementation of online platforms for the cooperative creation of a story. However, the design and creation of the website [www.manituana.com](http://www.manituana.com)—the online extension of the novel *Manituana*—represents a significant step toward the articulation of material, linguistic and discursive practices of intervention in terms of “transmedia storytelling” (Jenkins 21, 93). This method/concept was developed by the media scholar Henry Jenkins in his book *Convergence Culture* (2006). Indeed, the concept of transmedia storytelling so deeply influenced Wu Ming's forms of intervention in transmedia networks that it is helpful to briefly explain it.<sup>16</sup>

For the American scholar, the basic principle of transmedia storytelling is the creation of multiple narrative worlds across different media that reach diverse audiences and diversify consumers' points of entry into the stories that constitute these worlds. Transmedia narratives evolve in the passage from one media to the other—books, films, video games, fanfiction websites, Role Play Games (RPG)—receiving a specific contribution, from each mediated account, that does not create redundancy. The transmedia spread of these stories is usually strictly controlled by the corporate industries that own their rights—think of *Star Wars*, *Matrix* or super-heroes films and merchandising—but it is never reduced to it. Fan communities appropriate these narratives and disseminate them across multiple media, fostering storytelling

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<sup>16</sup> The collective and Jenkins benefited reciprocally from their encounter. Wu Ming members discovered Jenkin's theory in 2006 when they read *Convergence Culture*. The American scholar interviewed the activists in October 2006 (“How Slapshot”), while Wu Ming dedicated to Jenkins' theory several essays published on *Giap* between 2006 and 2007 (see the issues “Alzati che tis ta alzando la cultura popolare,” “Hasta Siempre,” and “Creare nuovi mondi”). In 2007, the collective also wrote the introduction to the Italian edition of *Convergence Culture*.



practices in directions that are not fully controlled by the corporation that owns the rights of the story. Engaging in transmedia storytelling practices therefore transforms the reception of content into a participative and collaborative process of knowledge sharing and production whose aim is “to ensure that everyone who invests time and effort will come away with a richer entertainment experience” (Jenkins, *Convergence* 21).

Wu Ming engage in a self-aware and constructive critique of Jenkins’ definition. As they argue, besides ensuring a diversified and entertaining experience, transmedia narrative practices must also “educare, fornire competenze, allenare alla trattativa, al pensiero collaborativo, all’uso della Rete” and transform users “da consumatori a moltiplicatori” of these skills (*Giap*, “Fare”). As Vittore Baroni argues in a conversation with Wu Ming 1: “nel web ... sta agli ideatori e ai fruitori di tali progetti far sì che l’impianto possa variare da un’interattività di tipo perlopiù ludico-edonistico ... o didattico ... ad esperimenti che incidano criticamente sui contesti estetici, politici e antropologici delle società attuali.” Moreover, if narrators want to produce “una cultura viva,” they will have to understand that their followers are “critici, partecipi, creativi e vitali” and “incentivare scambi e interazioni” (*Giap*, “Fare”). For this process to happen, it is key to open narratives to different contributions. This would expand narratives and reveal how they were built—its “codice sorgente”—in order to invite followers to critically engage with and creatively contribute to them (*Giap*, “Fare”).

Wu Ming’s design of the *Manituana* website put these reflections into practice. On the website, followers could find different materials: information about and a video trailer of the book; news, interviews and articles related to it; a map on Google Earth with the places where the events of the novel took place and their chronology; short stories that Wu Ming wrote before and after the publication of *Manituana*; and transmedia elaborations of its content by readers and

followers, such as songs, recorded readings, theatrical performances, comic strips, board games and even puppets.

Moreover, one of the sections of the website, called “Level 2,” allows users to access “un luogo dove i contenuti del romanzo e del sito vengono amplificati, estesi, messi in risonanza ... una possibilità di interazione, un’occasione per lavorare insieme alla creazione del mondo di Manituana, di cui il romanzo è certo l’asse portante ma non l’intera architettura” (Wu Ming, “Livello 2”). In order to have access to Level 2, users have to correctly answer a question related to the story of the book. Level 2 contains further materials about *Manituana*, like maps and documents about its historical characters, but the most interesting sections are dedicated to encouraging user interaction and revealing how the novel was written. For example, in the section “Officina,” Wu Ming uploaded chapters and episodes cut from the final version of the novel, e-mail exchanges between them about the work in progress, and recordings of their roundtable writing meetings. Making historical references, potential textual developments and accounts of their writing practices available on the website, Wu Ming invite readers to engage with them and write their own stories: “racconti prodotti dalla comunità dei lettori, in modo che il sito si trasformasse in un’estensione partecipata del romanzo e soprattutto del mondo che vogliamo esplorare” (Level 2). The section “Dramazioni” contains followers’ contributions, while the section “Conversazioni” allows users to post comments and join several discussions about the book.

Wu Ming scholars have either questioned or praised the *Manituana* participatory experiment. Gaia de Pascale claims that the transmedia narrative world of *Manituana* presents itself as incomplete and the call for reader participation expands and enriches it (84). According to Emanuela Patti, the website of *Manituana* gives only an “illusion of participation” because

“the stories created by *Manituana* fans are neither integrated in the novel at any point, nor do they form a collaborative narrative that is then turned into another novel” (50). The website and Level 2, as Estelle Paint argue, flatter the artistic vein and the intelligence of the reader “sans pour autant lui permettre de participer concrètement au processus d’écriture,” of which only Wu Ming members are in charge (148). Wu Ming’s transmedia projects for Emanuela Piga create networks of participation articulated in media machines that share diverse intensities and focus the attention of those who participate on the empowering potential of this diversity (“Comunità” 64, 69). Designing forms of intervention by experimenting with multiple media and technologies, Wu Ming “expand traditional ideas of narratives and passes...agency and power on to their readers” (Masterson 20).

The reason why I quote the different positions of the debate at this stage of my cartography is methodological: the key issue for me is not the degree to which the participatory nature of the online *Manituana* project can be criticized or vindicated. Rather, it is important for me to note how the critical evaluations (positive and negative) of the project share the same theoretical and methodological flaw: they reduce Wu Ming’s intervention to the act of writing and its linguistic manifestations. As it should be clear to the reader at this point, my cartographic approach to Wu Ming’s activism broadens the scope of the analysis to include the linguistic, material and discursive forms of intervention. The tripartite diversity of my categorization is necessary for understanding the full range of participatory practices that Wu Ming experiment with both online *and offline* transmedia networks.

Broadening the scope of the analysis of these networks therefore entails exploring the offline extensions of the *Manituana* project, which is only the first of a series of transmedia entanglements of storytelling practices that inform Wu Ming’s activism. Specifically in the

context of their literary production, Wu Ming's performances based on their novels/UNO do not merely *relate* to the content of these works, but expand it, multiplying and diversifying the material, linguistic and discursive approaches to the complexity of their historical accounts. Examples of this expansion are the reading-concerts, *Pontiac, storia di una rivolta* (2007) and *Razza partigiana* (2009), both staged and performed by Wu Ming 2 in collaboration with musicians and artists external to the collective. The former, historically close to the story of *Manituana*, will later become an audiobook accompanied by a booklet with music recordings, texts and drawings. The latter, drawn on a historical essay on the life of the Italian-Somali partisan Giorgio Marincola, was recorded and later attached to the book *Basta uno sparo* (2010) as a CD. The reading-concert and the book, together with the UNO *Timira*, which focuses on the life of Giorgio's sister, Isabella, will constitute "una grande narrazione transmediale sulla famiglia Marincola," the Italian Resistance and colonialism (Wu Ming, "Razza").<sup>17</sup>

Wu Ming's online and offline experiments with transmedia storytelling practices are materially embodied, linguistically informed and discursively charged forms of intervention. As Patti argues, still questioning the participatory potential of offline performances, "it is the 'community-effect,' in particular, combined with the aesthetic pleasure of the music-words combination that make readers feel 'internally' part of the story, not their active input into the narrative" (51). During these performances, she continues, "you are called to enter the scene in different ways, but, ultimately, you do not change or contribute to the story, unless by 'contributing' we mean reinforcing it through your support, being physically and emotionally present" (51). Patti's critique of Wu Ming's practices is a useful counterpoint that reinforces the methodological approach of my cartographic account. Even though she detects the need to

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<sup>17</sup> References to Wu Ming's productions published on their blog *Giap* or other websites will report the name of the author (Wu Ming) and the first word(s) of the content title (in this particular case "Razza"). In the Bibliography (Primary Sources, Section C), I report the hyperlink to the content referred in the body of the text.

conceive of participatory practices as linguistically, materially and discursively articulated, in the end she also falls into the trap of reducing all these articulations to the first. The diversity of my approach is programmatically aimed at preserving the diversity immanent to this tripartite categorization and dealing with Wu Ming's multifaceted interventions without reducing its complexity to one vertex of the triangle.

### One Last Look at the Map before Leaving

The methodological considerations made at the end of the previous section bring the first phase in my cartographic account to a close. In this chapter, I have presented a selection of key examples of Wu Ming's forms of interventions organized into the three territories of streets, literary paths and transmedia networks. The chapter's internal references speak for the need to conceive of the boundaries of these territories as constantly porous, provisional and becoming. The tripartite articulation of material, linguistic and discursive practices internal to each territory shares the same precarious condition. These practices converge on continuously evolving entanglements that enact Wu Ming's interventions. In this first phase, I have attempted to disentangle these entanglements in order to draw a map that would help the reader orient herself in the vast landscape of Wu Ming's activism; a landscape that would otherwise seem difficult to survey. However, now that some signposts have been established, the focus can shift on identifying and tracing the evolution of certain key trajectories that cut across the landscape. This will allow me to deepen the theoretical analysis of Wu Ming's project. Further, it will allow me to examine the ways in which their activism moves, slowly but surely, toward the realization that they must embrace the inherently and necessarily entangled nature of material, linguistic and discursive practices of subversion in order to succeed.

## Chapter 2

### Performing the Multitude: Linguistic and Material Enactments of Plurality and Singularity

#### Introduction

A portion of the map is now laid out before me. Wu Ming's forms of intervention are organized into streets, paths and networks, internally articulated into material, linguistic and discursive practices. What is missing? The cartographic account of Wu Ming's interventions presented in the previous chapter did not address the theoretical issues and debates that make it possible to fully appreciate the meaning, significance and originality, not only of their aims, but also of the modalities of implementation of their practices. The next three chapters engage with these issues and debates, following Wu Ming's trajectory across roads (Chapter 2), literary paths (Chapter 3) and transmedia networks (Chapter 4). From a methodological perspective, the chapters of my cartography do not follow the traditional argumentative articulation that starts with a theoretical discussion and then moves to the close analysis of the intervention. Rather, I establish a sustained dialogue between theory and practice, so that both dimensions simultaneously inform and emerge from each other in an interactive process defining Wu Ming's trajectory. Though more challenging for both writer and readers, this way of proceeding seems to me the most appropriate to understand the complexity of Wu Ming's initiatives, and the best way to push my analysis, embracing a constantly widening horizon.

As far as this chapter is concerned, I will use the concepts of performativity (Austin; Derrida; Butler, *Excitable*) and multitude (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* and *Multitude*; Lazzarato, *Signs*; Virno, *Grammar*) to unpack the entanglement of material, linguistic and discursive

practices of intervention that Wu Ming implemented in the period of the *tute bianche*. My cartography does not carry out a literary review of these concepts, but takes the key aspects needed to follow the trajectory of Wu Ming's interventions from the scholars who define them. The chapter initially focuses on what presents itself, at first, as a prevalently linguistic form of intervention: Wu Ming's text "Dalle moltitudini d'Europa in marcia contro l'Impero e verso Genova" (2001) (after this, also referred to as the "Manifesto"). Section 2.1 describes and contextualizes it in the heated exchanges between the *tute* representatives and the G8 institutional organizers, which criminalize the former exploiting mainstream media. Then, in section 2.2, I will take a theoretical step and draw on definitions of performativity. I will argue that the aim of Wu Ming's intervention in these exchanges is to re-signify mainstream media narratives engendering an alternative historical genealogy for the movement through the Manifesto. Wu Ming use the productive force of performative language as a linguistic practice that, entangled with the material practices implemented by the *tute* in the streets of Genoa, ultimately fosters the production of a political subjectivity. The Manifesto addresses this subjectivity as a plural "multitude" that opposes the neoliberal order of the "Empire" (Hardt and Negri). Wu Ming and the *tute*'s entanglement of linguistic and material practices therefore intervenes in the discursive domain, whose power structure I will present in a further theoretical step drawing on Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's political theory (2.3).

A close analysis of these practices through the concept of multitude, however, will reveal the flaws of the enactment of this concept by Wu Ming and the *tute* (2.4). Their intervention determines the political subjectivity in negative terms, as constituted by its oppositional attitude toward the Empire, and reduces its internal pluralism to a hegemonic subject that does not value the singularities composing it. Wu Ming will deal with these flaws in the aftermath of the G8,

engaging in the collective composition of narrative accounts of the protest where the combination of singular voices engenders a plural dialogic assemblage (2.5). These accounts point to the direction that the trajectory of Wu Ming's interventions will take across literary paths and transmedia networks.

## 2.1. "Dalle moltitudini d'Europa in marcia contro l'Impero e verso Genova"

Wu Ming wrote the text "Dalle moltitudini" in May 2001. The text was published online on the website [www.tutebianche.org](http://www.tutebianche.org) and circulated through the newsletter *Giap* on May 27. Wu Ming did not sign the text and distributed it anonymously, as an expression of the whole movement of the *tute*, which, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, acknowledged it as its Manifesto (Casarini). As Tommaso De Lorenzis argues in the Introduction to the volume *Giap! Tre anni di narrazioni e movimenti*, the Manifesto represents Wu Ming's most significant and disseminated linguistic form of intervention in the political mobilization against the Genoa G8 (xvii). Understanding the aims of this intervention requires retrieving the historical and political context in which it was made.

In the months preceding the summit, the political and mediatic confrontation between Italian governmental institutions and the associations gathered under the umbrella of the Genoa Social Forum, of which the *tute* were part, was harsh.<sup>18</sup> In early May, Italian mainstream

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<sup>18</sup> The review of the mediatic confrontation that I carry out in this paragraph draws on a series of accounts and analyses of what happened between the movement and the Italian government in the months before the summit and during the three days of the G8. For a historical contextualization of the alter-global movement and a description of the groups composing the Genoa Social Forum, see Andretta et al., *Global, Noglobal, New Global: la protesta contro il G8 a Genova*; Dal Lago and Mezzadra, "Il movimento globale"; and Chiesa, Giulietto, *G8/Genova*. An interesting account of the role of police forces before and during event is offered by della Porta and Reiter, *Polizia e protesta: il controllo dell'ordine pubblico in Italia dalla liberazione ai noglobal*. A detailed reconstruction of the mediatic discourse surrounding the G8 can be found in Cristante, *Violenza mediata: il ruolo dell'informazione nel G8 di Genova*; McDonnell, "The Genoa G8 and the Death of Carlo Giuliani"; and Menduni, "L'abbraccio mediatico al movimento." For a reflection upon the role youths played in the movement, see Cartocci and Corbetta, "Ventenni contro." The point of view of the movement and its participants is finally reported in Anaïs, *Le parole di Genova*:



newspapers targeted the participants in the *tute* and the GSF, representing them as radical rebels or denouncing their plans for acts of ecoterrorism or guerrilla initiatives. When Vittorio Agnoletto, spokesman of the GSF, publicly exposed the requests of the GSF on May 24—an area dedicated to public discussion and a series of plans for the demonstrations—he was mostly ignored by mainstream media and the members of the government who were in charge of security operations. Instead, the day after, these members announced that the army would be employed and the number of policemen involved would increase (Ravelli). The claims of the government captured the attention of the media and established the frame of the discourse surrounding the summit: the risks of tension, clashes and terrorist attacks were to justify the implementation of strict security measures.

This discursive frame has deep roots in Italian history and Italians' collective imaginary related to episodes of social unrest and conflict. The turmoil of the so-called “biennio rosso” (1919–20)—factories and land occupation, strikes, demonstrations, riots—temporarily disrupted social stability and spread a general feeling of *emergency* among the people—in particular the bourgeoisie, land owners and industrialists—and public authorities (Vivarelli 569–70; Spriano 38). In those years, as Roberto Vivarelli reports, “si riconferma tra le autorità di governo quello schema classificatorio secondo il quale i socialisti vengono generalmente considerati come forze antinazionali,” as enemies of the state, “a cui contrapporre le forze ‘sane’” (528, 531). The incapability of the government to fight against its “enemies” and answer the people's demands for order acted as one of the factors that justified—in the eyes of the Italian bourgeoisie—the violent repressions operated by the rising fascist squads (Chabod 52–53). Then, between the end of the 1960s and the 1970s, the demands for social change brought forth by students and workers

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*idee e proposte dal movimento*; and Casarini “Relazione delle tute bianche di fronte alla commissione conoscitiva sui fatti di Genova.”

were targeted as a new enemy of the social order. For the state, the movements constituted a new *emergency* that, as Luther Blissett argues in *Nemici dello stato*, was instrumental to the establishment of forms of coercion, repression and the suspension of constitutional rights (9). The primary goal of this discursive strategy is “il controllo sociale, la prevenzione di probabili ‘devianze’ e antagonismi” (Blissett, *Nemici* 9). The media have a key function in the implementation of this strategy, as they disseminate terror “con periodiche campagne d’allarme, tanto violente quanto strumentali, a cui seguono risposte in termini di ‘legge e ordine’ da parte della ‘gente,’ groviglio indistinto di campioni statistici stimolati a colpi di slogan e sondaggi—farsa” (Blissett, *Nemici* 10). The strategy of the Italian government—in a context that can be considered a laboratory for a phenomenon that is common to other Western societies (Blissett, *Nemici* 10)—aims to isolate movements willing to bring about change through constructive forms of social conflict, discredit them in the eyes of public opinion, and make capillary forms of institutional control a necessity. This attitude ultimately suffocates all the forces and energies that, as in the example of the anti-neoliberal movements, fight for justice and a more equal distribution of wealth.

In response to the governmental discursive strategy, on May 26 the *tute* issued a “Dichiarazione di guerra ai potenti dell’ingiustizia e della miseria” (Tute bianche). Far from being a formal war declaration, it was rather a symbolic attack aimed to attract the attention of the media and make the goals and non-violent practices of the *tute* publicly visible, so as to prevent criminalizing representations. Addressing institutional figures like the Italian Prime Minister, the declaration defends the right of class, gender and racial minorities to converge on the city and embody an alternative to the policies promoted by the G8.<sup>19</sup> The declaration,

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<sup>19</sup> “Il vostro mondo è un impero, voi gli imperatori, miliardi di esseri viventi semplici sudditi. Dalle periferie di questo impero, dai molti mondi che resistono e crescono con il sogno di un’esistenza migliore per tutti, oggi, noi,

however, did not contribute to change the discursive frame of the exchanges between the movement and the *tute*. Quantitative studies of newspaper headlines reporting these exchanges show that the most common terms associated with the keyword “tute bianche” in the days between July 15 and 29 are: “sfondare, mazza, forza, difendere, violenti” (Cristante 127). When the government decided that the area where the G8 was going to take place—the red zone—would be off-limits for those without permission and armored by a wall, the *tute* responded that their goal would be to trespass it, disobey any limitation to the right to demonstrate imposed by neoliberal powers, disrupt the summit operations and block the G8 (Ravelli).

Published the day after the war declaration, Wu Ming’s Manifesto is influenced by the harsh tones of the context in which it intervenes and, as the historian Franco Cardini argued at the time, can be considered a second “dichiarazione di guerra.” Yet the Manifesto, unlike its predecessor, does not address institutional figures or identify itself as a programmatic statement by the *tute*. “Dalle moltitudini” is a much more imaginative text: it contains an emotional and spontaneous appeal, a call for participating in a common fight, an invocation of past stories of struggles for bringing about and fostering the current one. The linguistic strategies employed in the Manifesto are diverse and complex, and reward close analysis. The opening paragraph of the text is composed of statements made by a first-person plural narrator who speaks for a political collectivity with deep roots in European history:

Noi siamo nuovi, ma siamo quelli di sempre. Siamo antichi per il futuro, esercito di disobbedienza le cui storie sono armi, da secoli in marcia su questo continente. Nei nostri stendardi è scritto ‘dignità.’ In nome di essa combattiamo chi si vuole padrone

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piccoli sudditi ribelli, vi dichiariamo formalmente guerra ... Vi annunciamo formalmente che anche noi siamo scesi sul piede di guerra. Saremo a Genova e il nostro esercito di sognatori, di poveri e bambini, di indios del mondo, di donne e di uomini, di gay, lesbiche, artisti e operai, di giovani e anziani, di bianchi, neri, gialli e rossi, disobbedirà alle vostre imposizioni.”

di persone, campi, boschi e corsi d'acqua, governa con l'arbitrio, impone l'ordine dell'Impero, immiserisce le comunità.

The first sentences are emphatic in tone and, from the beginning, establish the long historical genealogy and the political agenda of the collective ensemble: civil disobedience<sup>20</sup> and the fight for dignity against the stakeholders who abuse their power and want to control human beings, natural resources and common rights. As these sentences make clear, this agenda does not belong to the present movement only, but is the expression of the long history of struggles that inform the Manifesto.

After the first paragraph, the text presents fourteen examples of popular revolts against power, which begin with the 1358 French *Jacquerie* and end with the 1871 Paris commune. Each example is assigned a paragraph of different length, but similar structure: the first sentence, opened with the anaphor of the verb “siamo” in the present tense, identifies the revolt, calling it by its usual name (“ciompi” or “diggers”), referring to the class of the participants (“i contadini di Inghilterra”) or mentioning the acknowledged leader of the revolt (“Hans il pifferaio,” “il generale Ludd”). Then, using the past tense, the narrator denounces the abuses of power, describes the rebellion against such abuses and the repression that ensued. The last sentence of each paragraph mixes past, present and future tenses to underscore the historical continuum between past, present and future struggles: the continuity of the fight against power and the contribution of each singular movement to the history of this fight produce a crescendo that culminates in the last paragraph of the text.

In this last section, the sequence of anaphoric “siamo” is interrupted by the pronoun “loro,” which identifies the enemies who christen themselves using “sigle esoteriche: G8, FMI,

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<sup>20</sup> The concept of civil disobedience refers to a specific set of practices that defy the legitimation of the law and the powers that establish it. The disobedience is civil because it is carried out by the citizens themselves, those who live under this law. For a more thorough analysis of this concept see section 2.3 and 2.4.

WB, WTO, NAFTA, FTAA.” As the collective “noi,” these contemporary enemies also have a long genealogy, which the text reproduces *in accumulatio*. The paragraph enumerates the names of and the actions perpetrated by the enemies previously mentioned by the Manifesto. All the historical episodes are condensed in a limited space, speeding the rhythm of the crescendo up to the finale, where the urgent need for the present struggle comes back in all its urgency (“Oggi hanno un nuovo impero... Contro di loro, ancora una volta, noi moltitudini ci solleviamo”).<sup>21</sup>

The Manifesto constitutes a strong call for the reader’s participation in this struggle. The text encourages the reader to situate herself in the historical continuum of struggles between exploited and exploiters. However, it does not simply ask her to imagine herself in it or to be empathetic toward its protagonists. The text wants to provoke a reaction: it asks the reader to stand up, fight in the present and take part in a collective subjectivity that is historically rooted. In the Manifesto, as Giuliana Benvenuti argues about the novel *Q*—which narrates the story of the peasants’ wars in sixteenth century Europe—Wu Ming use history performatively. The text exerts performative force because it “induce il lettore a sentirsi parte di una comunità in lotta che attraversa il ‘tempo lungo’ di una storia plurisecolare” and makes use of history as “una prassi del racconto che intende trascinare il lettore entro la lotta” (75). The performativity of this text faithfully relies on “la possibilità che la parola modifichi la realtà, creando una comunità potenzialmente in grado di agire” (78). For Benvenuti, the performative force of Wu Ming’s discursive practices consists in their capacity for creating bonds and fostering the production of a political subjectivity.

The interest of Benvenuti’s analysis for my cartographic account lies in her shifting the attention from what Wu Ming’s language simply says to what it does—namely its

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<sup>21</sup> According to Wu Ming, the supranational institutions listed in the Manifesto compose a new imperial order. I will analyze the concept of the Empire and its influence on the writing of the Manifesto in the third section of this chapter.

performativity—and what the aims of this performativity are. Benvenuti’s argument reveals how Wu Ming’s early experiments with linguistic forms of intervention are informed by the need to situate individual actions in a discursively situated collective effort. However, Benvenuti does not explore the concept of linguistic, material and discursive performativity from a theoretical perspective. Her interpretation, therefore, begs some crucial questions such as: what does she mean exactly by “performative use of history”? How is language implicated in the reductive use of history as “una prassi del racconto”? Does she conceive of the creative power of performative language as an ontological productive practice or as partaking in dynamics where other material and discursive practices are at work? What are the boundaries of the community that this language creates? And where, in the current system of power relations, does the linguistic enactment of this community situate it?

To answer these questions we need a more thorough investigation of the concept of performativity which will help us better understand the significance and trajectory of Wu Ming’s interventions, including their eventual flaws or shortcomings.

## 2.2. The Concept of Performativity

The original definition of performative language, from which a wide range of interpretations and the concept of performativity itself stemmed, was formulated by J. L. Austin in his landmark work *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). The key point made by the English philosopher was relatively straightforward: linguistic expressions do not simply represent or refer to reality, but constitute ontologically productive speech acts that have effects on reality and imply actions. For Austin, a linguistic expression is performative when expressed by a subject endowed with agency or authority, in a specific context and according to accepted

conventional procedures that make the expression a productive action. Austin, and its later interpreters, distinguish two kinds of productivity: illocutionary, when the linguistic formula of the speech act brings something into “being” within a pre-established conventional context—like in the christening of a ship or in the sentence pronounced by a marrying couple (“I do,” 5) —or perlocutionary, when the performative, acting upon the receiver, through linguistic and non-linguistic means, engenders unpredictable and unconventional consequences or reactions.

My cartographic analysis of Wu Ming’s Manifesto extracts from Austin’s definition of the performative two essential propositions: first, in order to be performative the statement must be made by an individuated subject whose agency is responsible for carrying out the act; and second, the act and its performative force emerge within a set of conventions, social relations and non-linguistic means that constitute “the total speech act in the total speech situation” (52)—what I will also refer to as its context. Keeping in mind that the two propositions are necessarily entangled, I will begin by exploring the second point and then move to the first, which requires a more elaborate treatment.

Delimiting “the total speech act in the total speech situation” with respect to the Manifesto involves considering the dissemination of the text and the internal references to past speech acts which echo across history. Both of these factors significantly complicate the task of establishing the boundaries of the situation. When Wu Ming circulated the Manifesto online and offline, the members of the movement appropriated it, made its words theirs and contributed to spreading and transforming the text into a collective speech act reiterated in different contexts. For example, the band Utter Bliss, guided by the female voice of the performer Anna Rispoli, recited and put the text into music. The singers’ voices endowed the text with a physically embodied performative force. The recording, which prefigures the transmedia extensions of Wu

Ming's practices described in the previous chapter, went viral. It multiplied the contexts and the forms of fruition of the Manifesto's linguistic signs and acted as a continuous repetition—quotation of Wu Ming's words.

Also, on four occasions in “Dalle moltitudini,” Wu Ming cite past speech acts that, coming from different historical contexts, make the Manifesto's speech situation multifaceted and complex. For instance, Wu Ming quote the words of the preacher John Ball, who inspired the farmers' rebellion in fourteenth century England (“Quando Adamo zappava ed Eva filava, chi era allora il padrone?”), or the principles uttered by “la Madonna di Niklashausen” to Hans the Piper, who in 1476 led a program of social reforms in the city of Niklashausen (“Niente più re né principi. Niente più papato né clero. Niente più tasse né decime. I campi, le foreste e i corsi d'acqua saranno di tutti. Tutti saranno fratelli e nessuno possederà più del suo vicino”). The past speech acts cited in the Manifesto also include the slogan “*Omnia sunt communia*”—in the Italian text, “Tutte le cose sono comuni”—coined by the radical theologian Thomas Müntzer during the sixteenth century peasants' wars, and passages from Lord Byron's speech against the issue of the Frame Work Bill in the House of Lords (1812).<sup>22</sup> These speech acts are empowered by heterogeneous sets of social conventions, rituals and beliefs and belong in different contexts whose boundaries enter and merge with the boundaries of the Manifesto's speech situation. Therefore, the heterogeneity of the speech acts quoted in the text and its largescale dissemination make it extremely complex to delimit the speech situation of the Manifesto and ascribe the speech act to a unique context regulated by determined social relations, as Austin's theory would imply.

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<sup>22</sup> “Non c'è abbastanza sangue nel vostro codice penale, che se ne deve versare altro perché salga in cielo e testimoni contro di voi? Come applicherete questa legge? Chiuderete un intero paese nelle sue prigioni? Alzerete una forca in ogni campo e appenderete uomini come spaventacorvi? O semplicemente attuerete uno sterminio? ... Sono questi i rimedi per una popolazione affamata e disperata?”



In order to make sense of this complexity and understand the Manifesto's performative force, I will tap into two influential critiques of the concept of performativity carried out respectively by Jacques Derrida in his essay "Signature, Event, Context" ([1971] 1988) and Judith Butler in her book *Excitable Speech* (1997).<sup>23</sup> Although I am not inclined to share all the epistemological implications of Derrida's theory here, his critique of the performative is a helpful theoretical tool because it unhinges the speech act from a specific, temporally and spatially determined context. The boundaries of a speech situation, he argues, should not be exhaustively defined or determined ("Signature" 3). As the French philosopher wrote, "every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written...can be cited, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts" ("Signature" 12).

However, aligning myself with Butler's reading of Derrida (*Excitable Speech* 14), the autonomy of the sign from its previous contextual use is not absolute, and does not mean that the sign's performative force is limited to a single context regulated by a specific set of conventions. The citability of the mark makes its force stem from the plurality of contexts that compose the present speech situation. Every speech act, as Butler argues, is a moment of "condensed historicity" that carries with it the history of its previous and potentially future enactments (*Excitable Speech* 3). Therefore in the Wu Ming Manifesto, the historical quotations are partially disengaged from their original context and then shape and are shaped by the meaning and the purpose of the current struggle, which they help to contextualize in historical, social and political terms. Each "mark," as Derrida would put it, contributes to produce the genealogy of the movement and situate the present struggle in a historical continuum.

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<sup>23</sup> *Excitable Speech* is my core reference for Butler's theory. Her well-known and seminal discussion of performativity, however, begins in the field of gender studies and the seminal books *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993).

The context of the struggle against the G8, mapped in the previous section, is characterized by the media representation of the movement—and the *tute* in particular—as criminals, rebels, outrageous threats to the current social order. Implementing narrative strategies typical of contemporary institutional powers that “far from eliminating master narratives, actually produce and reproduce them...in order to validate and celebrate their own power” (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 34), mainstream media delegitimize the *tute* through a narrative that characterizes them as enemies, marginal and uncontrollable variables whose threat to the neoliberal system justifies repression. The Manifesto aims to subvert these discursive processes of marginalization and criminalization, showing their repetitive mechanism throughout history and opening a space for an alternative narrative in the present.

Any past attempt by institutional powers to erase the memory of the struggles—repressions, executions, exterminations—and the defeats undergone by the movement are subverted and transformed into the steps of an affirmative historical continuum. The text enacts the subversion by adopting the unconventional perspective of the lower classes, and engendering the continuum articulated by different verb tenses. The narrator starts each paragraph with the present tense—see the anaphor of the verb “siamo”—then narrates the past struggles using the past tense, and finally closes each paragraph with an expression projecting the past fight into the current one (“ma il povero Konrad ancora si solleva”) or a verb foretelling its future evolution (“Pugaciov fu catturato, ma il seme avrebbe dato frutti”). By establishing these connections, the text brings the genealogy of the current movement into being and enacts it as an alternative to master narratives.

Moreover, the format of the text and the conventions of the manifesto as a discursive genre contribute to making this narrative, and the performative language that engenders it, a

foundational moment. The tradition of this genre—think of well-known texts like the Communist Party Manifesto or twentieth century avant-garde manifestos—provides the language of “Dalle moltitudini” with a set of, in Austin’s terminology, illocutionary conventions. These conventions empower the language of the Manifesto, which programmatically becomes instrumental to the historical and cultural emancipation of an alternative political subject. Is the language of the Manifesto, however, a mere instrument for the emancipation of this political subject? Does its language simply express the existence of an individuated subject or play a role in its constitution?

To answer these questions, my cartography must now return to Austin and deal with his postulate that a performative speech act necessitates the agency of an individuated subject to whom can be attributed the responsibility for carrying out the act. Here, I will follow the argument in *Excitable Speech*, which bridges Austin’s theory with Althusser’s notion of interpellation. Butler’s immediate concern is to understand the performative force of hate speech and, therefore, engaging with the specifics of her argument would bring me too far from the scope of my analysis. I will now present the key points for the development of my discussion. Butler argues that, in theorizing the speech act, Austin assumes the existence of an individuated human subject: “a sovereign agent with a purely instrumental relation to language,” who is in charge of carrying out the task (*Excitable Speech* 26). Austin seems to acknowledge that the subject “speaks conventionally,” invoking formulas whose agential force derives from its past implementations (*Excitable Speech* 25), but he does not abandon the idea that the sovereign subject pre-exist the moment of speaking. This is where Butler departs from Austin and embraces Althusser’s contention that the subject is brought into being through the act of interpellation. That is, a voice through which speaking enacts a specific set of power relations

and produces the subject position involved in them at the moment of the utterance. Therefore, Butler uses Althusser's concept of interpellation to deconstruct Austin's notion of the sovereign subject and argue that language "is the condition of possibility for the speaking subject and not merely its instrument of expression" (*Excitable Speech* 28). As such, language constitutes and constrains the subject, addressing it and performatively anticipating its being and its position within a set of power relations. At the same time, however, language enables the power of the subject as actor, who speaks and gives it a determinate possibility of social existence.

What Butler does contest in Althusser is rooting interpellation in a god-like voice whose authority, "the authority of the 'voice' of ideology, the 'voice' of interpellation, is figured as a voice almost impossible to refuse" (*Excitable Speech* 31). Althusser ultimately reinstates the existence of a sovereign entity (read ideology) that determines the conditions of subjectivity. The possibility for a refusal, Butler argues, emerges from two features of the speech act: its ritual and repetitive nature and its need to be materialized in sets of embodied power relations. These acts, and the subjects they enact, derive their agency from their "condensed historicity," through repetition and iteration of conventions and discursive formulas. For the enactment to work, however, "it requires certain kinds of circumstances, and it requires a venue of power by which its performative effects might be materialized" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 12). It is the need for these formulas to be repeated through bodily acts and within sets of power relations that, for Butler, opens a space of possibilities for contesting them, parodying them and, as Derrida would phrase it, putting them "between quotation marks." The material contribution of the body to the speech act—its performative and expressive capacity at the moment of the performance or its reactions to, say, performative interpellations—cannot be fully controlled by either the intention of the agent (i.e., ideology) or its authority. Here, in this discursive, linguistic and materially

embodied space, alternative performative actions can subvert conventional discursive formations, their imposed conditions of subjectivity, and the power relations that inform them (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 12).

Butler's argument contributes to my analysis of the Manifesto by clarifying the dynamics of its performativity. Wu Ming's text intervenes in a specific context, challenging the media representations of the movement; in other words, the way the *tute* were addressed by institutional powers. Wu Ming implement linguistic practices that performatively engender an alternative genealogy of the movement. This genealogy, however, does not postulate the pre-existence of an individuated political subject that has an instrumental relation to language. On the contrary, the language of the Manifesto is performative insofar as it contributes to ontologically producing an alternative political subjectivity. The anaphoric repetition of identity statements—"noi siamo..."—constitutes an illocutionary speech act that christens the movement, constituting it as a collectivity of historical forces opposed to institutional powers. Each time the pronoun "noi" is written, uttered, heard or read, it shapes the subjectivity of those who are interacting with it. The pronoun questions them, asking with whom/what they belong, where they situate themselves politically, socially and historically. The pronoun prompts perlocutionary (re)actions that contribute to an ontological production of an active, moving, and self-conscious collective political subjectivity. The Manifesto gives this collectivity a social and political existence within a re-signified historical genealogy and performatively engenders this subjectivity against neoliberal conceptions of the subject.

Butler's theoretical argument not only provides me with a framework for understanding the ontological force of the language of the Manifesto, but it reminds me of its necessary entanglement with the *tute*'s material practices, which they implement in the streets as presented

in the previous chapter. The *tute* embody the genealogy of the Manifesto. The historical forces it quotes are materially grounded in the bodies of those who fought for their dignity in the past and now call for the bodily reaction of contemporary readers. The resignification of the movement's media representations therefore operates through the implementation of linguistic and material practices of opposition to institutional powers.

Moreover, Butler's argument reminds us that these linguistic and material practices are framed within the current set of neoliberal power relations. The necessary step, therefore, is to explore, in greater detail, which specific power structure the movement is opposing and what theoretical concepts the Manifesto uses to describe such structure and envision an alternative. This is what I will do in the next section, as I push my analysis of the linguistic and material practices implemented by Wu Ming in the Manifesto and beyond.

### 2.3. Multitude and Empire: Face-Off

Both the performative language of "Dalle moltitudini," the bodies of the *tute* and the political subjectivity they engender are embedded in a specific system of power relations. The Manifesto constructs this system in oppositional terms, as a confrontation between institutional powers—among which the G8 is only a contemporary example—and the members of the lower classes that these powers exploit. The text names the two poles of this confrontation "Impero" and "moltitudini," and respectively refers to them with the two pronouns "loro" and "noi." The terms empire and multitude correspond to two philosophical concepts that the alter-global movement was using widely for their interpretation and understanding of the current geopolitical system. The popularity of these concepts had been recently revived by the publication of the book *Empire* (2000) by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in which the two theorists analyze this

system and argue that it is now controlled by a new form of imperial power. The two theorists' analysis continues in *Multitude* (2004), where they define the multitude as the political alternative to the Empire which grows within the system of the latter. My cartographic analysis of the Manifesto will draw on these two books to situate Wu Ming's intervention within the neoliberal system of power relations. Further, it will contrast the performative attempt by the Manifesto to produce a political subjectivity with neoliberal forms of control of this process.

As Hardt and Negri write, the Empire is a new global order established by the globalization of markets and capitalist production processes. The Empire is "composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule" (*Empire* xii) that overcomes the declining sovereignty of nation states. These organisms, which Wu Ming lists in the last paragraph of the Manifesto, bring together economic and political power and engender "a properly capitalist order," structured as a network (*Empire* 9). This order has neither a territorial centre of power nor boundaries, but "it is a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm" (*Empire* xii). This realm is not only geographical, political or economic. The order of the Empire appropriates and exploits contemporary forms of production of wealth and expands its realm to the cultural and social domain.

For Hardt and Negri, who draw on Michel Foucault's definition of "society of control" (*Empire* 22), the Empire imposes its global order on society in biopolitical terms, controlling what communication industries produce. In the current system of power relations, individuals are not simply instructed by discipline, but are also controlled through instruments and machines that organize the totality of their activities (*Empire* 405). For Maurizio Lazzarato, these forms of control "operate at the intersection of two heterogeneous power apparatuses: social subjection

and machinic enslavement” (*Signs* 24). The former assigns “an individual subjectivity, an identity, a sex,” a social role to human beings, and “through language it creates a signifying and representational web from which no one escapes” (*Signs* 24). The latter manages human beings not as separate individuals or individuated subjects, but as molecular components of human-machines assemblages. While subjection functions according to a dualist logic (subject/object, man/woman), enslavement creates “ontologically ambiguous entities” where “nonhumans contribute just as humans do to defining the framework and conditions of action” (*Signs* 30). Human agents become “points of connection, junction and disjunction” of decoded flows—monetary or communication flows—structured as human-machines networks. These networks absorb variables and differences “ensuring the cohesion and equilibrium of the functioning of the whole” (*Signs* 25). As Hardt and Negri explain, the goal of the Empire machine is not to deny the existence of social, cultural and biological differences, but to organize them in regimes of homogenization and differentiation that tether them to equilibria, reducing complexities (*Empire* 34).

Communication industries contribute to the establishment of these power apparatuses producing languages, networks of communication, and “goods” that create and transform consumers’ minds, bodies and ideologies (Lazzarato, *Lavoro immateriale* 42). Language becomes both an industrial product and a means of production, which, “as it communicates, produces commodities but moreover creates subjectivities, puts them in relation, and orders them” (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 32–33). In this new paradigm, those who control the means of production also control the production of imaginary, material embodiments and, ultimately, subjectivity. As Hardt and Negri write, “the great industrial and financial powers ... produce not only commodities but also subjectivities. They produce ... needs, social relations, bodies, and



minds” (*Empire* 32). In the new world order, language and communication are performative instruments of production that do not “only express but also organize the globalization ... by multiplying and structuring interconnections through networks” (*Empire* 32–33).

However, as previously discussed, there is no agency or authority that can fully control the outcomes of linguistic performances. In Butler’s definition of performativity as a specific modality of discursive power, the same subjects biopolitically produced by the imperial order can conversely produce alternative subjectivities citing, parodying and re-signifying the embodied norms of that order. This is precisely what the Manifesto and the material practices of the *tute* intend to do as they intervene to subvert the order and engender an ontological alternative. More specifically, the Manifesto gives this alternative a social and political existence within a re-signified historical genealogy and performatively engenders its subjectivity against mainstream media narratives—or what I can now call the imperial system of social subjection. The text addresses this alternative political subjectivity as multitude, that which, for Hardt and Negri, constitutes the “living alternative within the Empire ... a network that provides the means of encounter so that we can work and live in common” (*Empire* xiv). For the two scholars, the multitude is a political project that implies the construction of alternative social relations, imaginaries and power relations that exclude exploitation and the controlled reduction of differences. Hardt and Negri’s concept of the multitude is radically different from the unifying notion of the people, the homogenizing idea of the mass or the exclusive category of the working class. The multitude is a composition of “plural singularities” that does not reduce, erase or negate difference for the sake of an undifferentiated identity and “acts on the basis of what the singularities share in common” (*Multitude* 100). The acts of the multitude are not informed by an eschatological or finalistic aim (Negri, *Kairòs* 125), but they are part of a political project that

must be constructed through the re-appropriation of language and the consequent creation of new singular and plural subjectivities (Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* 212).

In Hardt and Negri's definition, the multitude is the kind of collective political subject that can undermine the apparatus of social subjection from within the imperial system. While the latter individualizes the subject, producing it as an individuated entity within controlled equilibria of homologation and differentiation, the multitude builds its own subjectivity on the constitution of a collective subject, acts of cooperation and sharing. However, the system of social subjection also produces collective subjectivities—the people, the mass, the public—that are functional to the preservation of the imperial equilibria. These subjectivities organize the role of the individual in economic, social and political ensembles according to the dualist logic of identity and difference, sameness and otherness—a logic that the Empire exploits to generate and justify aversion of the other. The emancipatory project of the multitude must abandon this logic, not simply negate it. The relationship between singular and plural dimension must be founded on new forms of relationality (Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* 127).

The constitution of the multitude and its project face a pragmatic political challenge: making it possible “for a social multiplicity to manage to communicate and act in common while remaining internally different” (Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* xiv). In other words, the project of the multitude needs to engender a set of material, linguistic and discursive forms of interaction and organization that *both* foster the creation of common initiatives *and* acknowledge the action of each singularity as a fundamental and distinct contribution to their existence. Interventions that aim to performatively enact the multitude must find the most effective linguistic and material practices for articulating these processes of interaction and organization. Wu Ming's writing of the Manifesto experiments with linguistic articulations of these processes. However,

as we shall see, the experiment is not able to engender the same level of differential multiplicity that the demonstrators embody in the streets. The oppositional structure of the Manifesto follows the imperial dualist logic of identity and difference. Therefore, it inevitably flaws its performative production of a political subjectivity as multitude.

Moreover, while the Manifesto problematically enacts an alternative subjectivity that opposes the forms of imperial social subjection, the linguistic practices implemented in the text do not find or propose a solution to the systematic apparatus of machinic enslavement. Here, I need to follow Lazzarato's critique of Butler's argument in *Excitable Speech*. For the Italian philosopher, the performative subversion or re-signification of linguistically imposed conventional norms—or, in the case of the Manifesto, of mainstream media narratives and imperial forms of subjection—does not constitute a real and emancipative ontological break (*Signs* 172–77). Although these linguistic forms of intervention can, by producing heterogeneous subjectivities, temporarily undermine the forms of social subjection carried out by the Empire, the networks of machinic enslavement will continue to function at the molecular level, controlling human beings' embodied desires and beliefs. These molecular forms of control, Lazzarato explains, re-absorb the linguistically engendered differentiations and make their innovative subjectivities work towards the re-establishment of the equilibrium. The performative resignification of discursive categories does not break the forms of enslavement through which the Empire controls the self because it only intervenes in processes of subjectivity production at the discursive level.

Lazzarato argues that the construction of an alternative subjectivity must be founded on an existential and “subjective mutation” (*Signs* 16) that operates at the molecular and pre-discursive level, where linguistic forms of re-signification only have a secondary role.

Emancipatory political actions, he states, must first aim at “converting the machinic dimension into forms of subjectivation that critique, reconfigure and redistribute” the identities, roles and functions that social subjections assign to human beings. Machinic (non)human networks, therefore, are plural assemblages of agencies whose pluralism must be embraced to contest dichotomous models of subjectivity. Secondly, the goal of these emancipatory actions must be “that of taking enslavement’s desubjectivation as an opportunity for producing something other than paranoid, productivist, consumerist individualism” (Lazzarato, *Signs* 36). The pluralism of machinic assemblages, in other words, does not only potentially undermine dichotomous approaches, but constitutes networks of distributed (non)human agencies that call for relational and collective definitions of subjectivity.

As I understand Lazzarato’s argument, the project of the multitude must still aim for the constitution of an alternative political subjectivity, but this constitution must be grounded in a post-anthropocentric ethical approach to the operations of machinic enslavement. To develop alternative ethical relations with (non)human others and, ultimately, foster new political assemblages, the human self has to convert the operations of machinic enslavement to which it is subjected into an opportunity for establishing sustainable networks of (non)human collaborations and coexistence. The problem that I have with Lazzarato’s theory, however, is that it does not fully explore the role that nonhuman agencies play in the production of an alternative subjectivity. This further step can be conceptualized by adopting Barad’s ontology. While Lazzarato proposes that strikes, riots and revolts are examples of the emancipatory actions he theorizes (*Signs* 223), in these proposals, I see the return of an anthropocentric approach to political forms of intervention, which is precisely what his theory seems poised to avoid. Further, his critique of Butler’s *Excitable Speech* must be handled with care. While I have previously

shown that Butler does not dismiss the agential contribution of material embodiments to speech acts, he seems to reduce her conception of discursive performativity to linguistic practices of re-signification. What could support Lazzarato's critique is a clearer exposition of how the apparatus of machinic enslavement gets to co-opt the materiality of the human body. This, for Butler, is the primary locus of possibility for forms of discursive re-signification. The post-anthropocentric take of Lazzarato's theory—that is not echoed by his exemplifications—can also be used to illuminate another limit in Butler's theory: namely, the anthropocentric bias in her conception of matter and the role it plays in material-discursive processes of production of subjectivity. These considerations anticipate issues that I am going to tackle in the next two chapters. They are essential here as well, insofar as they make two observations possible. On the one hand, the first is the ability to understand Wu Ming's project and the full significance of their Manifesto intervention. On the other hand, they also shed light on the limits of this early experience and the horizons that opened through reflecting on those limits.

#### 2.4. A Close Reading of the Manifesto and its Material Embodiments

Having defined the concept of the multitude from a theoretical perspective, my cartography now goes back to the text of the Manifesto and its embodiment by the *tute* in order to deal with the material and linguistic practices that aim to enact its political subjectivity in the current discursive domain. This section establishes a dialogue between the analyses of the two sets of practices, comparing and contrasting them in order to illuminate the positive and negative aspects of their interaction. By positive interaction, I mean instances in which the two sets work toward the production of consistent forms of subjectivity and relationality. A negative interaction occurs when the performative enactment of the multitude is dissonant. The starting point of my

analysis is the text of the Manifesto itself. My primary interest here is to understand how Wu Ming's linguistic forms of intervention are entangled with their embodied strategies and how these entanglements strengthen or weaken the performative enactment of the multitude in the political discourse.

The linguistic practices implemented in the Manifesto organize and articulate the interaction between the singular and plural dimensions of the multitude at the level of its textual structure, content and rhetorical forms. The subjectivity enacted by the text is not simply one multitude, but a composition of different historical multitudes: a “movement of movements,” as the alter-global forces called themselves at the time (Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* 87). Each paragraph can be read both as a distinct unit accounting for the activism of a historically situated multitude, and as a singular linguistic manifestation of the plural political subjectivity enacted by the whole text. Depending on whether one reads the paragraph as a distinct unit or a piece of the puzzle, singular and plural dimensions are articulated differently.

In the first case, the unifying voice of the first-person plural narrator is predominant and makes the collective dimension dominate the individual. The leaders of the revolt are often mentioned (a carder, John Ball, Ian Hus, Hans the piper, the commander Dozsa, Thomas Muntzer and Pugaciov), but their role is marginal and seen from the collective perspective of the rebels' ensemble. In two paragraphs, the names of general Ludd and captain Swing—two pseudonyms that the rebels used to sign their written demands—only appear to embody an individual figure, while actually hiding a plurality of actors using the same name. The rhetorical form of each paragraph does not focus on the individual dimension of the fight against institutional power, but on the collective. Here, singularities matter as long as they belong to an ensemble that blurs their individuality.

This approach to the relationship between singular and collective dimension is consistent with the *tute*'s material practice of wearing white overalls. The choice of wearing this common sign of identification programmatically marks the collective nature of a movement where nobody is visibly distinguishable as the leader. Everyone wearing white overalls and engaging in this material practice is part of the *tute*. This material practice, however, also reduces the diversity internal to the movement to a hegemonic figure. The hegemony of the white overalls, and the practices related to it, do not focus on the contribution of the singular demonstrator to the protest. Rather, they acknowledge her participation in a praxis that merges her individuality into the movement. Moreover, the white overall is a symbol that mainstream media can easily exploit to target the movement and associate it with criminalizing narratives.

Two phenomena—one foregoing and one contextual to the G8 street protest—counterpoint these observations. First, in May, the *tute* launched a survey on their website asking members whether the practices of the *tute* were appropriate; whether it was right to use them to trespass the red zone; and whether strategies of self-defense against the eventual brutality of the police should be planned.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, in the days before the march, the members of the *tute* met and carefully prepared their defensive protections and tools. They worked together, yet individually, each one designing and setting up their garments. The street strategies of the *tute* are therefore entangled with material and linguistic forms of collaboration that inform them, leaving some space for and acknowledging singular contributions. More significantly still, on the

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<sup>24</sup> From the website [www.tutebianche.org](http://www.tutebianche.org): “Siamo tornati dal Messico con la determinazione di seguire l'insegnamento zapatista del “Camminare domandando.” Bene, ci chiediamo adesso cosa dovremo fare a Genova nei giorni del G8. Piuttosto che risponderci da soli preferiamo rivolgere la domanda ai compagni di viaggio che abbiamo incontrato e che ancora dobbiamo incontrare. Così il 26 maggio 2001 al Palazzo Ducale di Genova apriremo con 3 domande le nostre consultazioni: 1) E' giusto praticare la disobbedienza civile? 2) E' giusto esprimerla con l'invasione dei nostri corpi nelle zone off-limits? 3) E' giusto pensare a forme di autodifesa se la polizia cercherà di massacrarci e violerà palesemente i diritti umani? Raccoglieremo suggerimenti, ascolteremo voci e ci conteremo, per capire se e quanti, nei giorni del vertice andremo a cingere d'assedio la Zona Rossa occupata dagli 8 più grandi e meschini vassalli dell'impero.”

day of the march, the members of the *tute* decided not to wear the white overalls, as they were now part of the anti-neoliberal multitude of singularities protesting against the G8. The decision valued the diverse conformation of the participants' bodies, dismissed the hegemonic symbol and undermined the targeting strategy of mainstream media. The *tute* practices thus intervened to disrupt the discursive system of social subjection that identified the people wearing the white garment as a threat. They proposed an alternative subjectivity that did not want to be clearly distinguishable from the rest of the anti-neoliberal multitude.

If, taking my cue from the *tute* gesture, I try to make the Manifesto “take off the white overalls” and read each paragraph as a singular enactment of the plural political subjectivity that the whole text engenders, the linguistic practices of the Manifesto seem to positively interact with the embodied practices of the *tute*. The voice of the first-person plural narrator remains dominant throughout the text, but the collective subjectivity it embodies is now the result of a composition of different movements. Each movement is a singular entity that composes the multitude enacted by the whole Manifesto. The interaction between material and linguistic practices is, however, only apparently positive. While the demonstrators in the streets embody a diverse and plural set of gender and racial differences—on July 19, for instance, the GSF organized a “Corteo dei migranti” with people from all over the world—the content of the Manifesto is affected by a Eurocentric and patriarchal perspective. Although the text was published in different languages—English, Spanish and French—the Manifesto does not take into consideration revolts that took place outside Europe, as if the current struggle of the anti-neoliberalist multitude was a European affair. Moreover, except for the role of two religious figures—Eve and the Madonna of Niklashausen—in inspiring and blessing the struggles, the text



does not present any other manifestation of a physically and historically embodied female agency.

Reading the diversity bias of the Manifesto through Paolo Virno's definition of the multitude can help us understand, though it does not justify it. For the Italian philosopher, the process of individuation of the multitude as subjectivity consists of the combination of the singular forms of individuation of its components. These singular forms of individuation all have "a non-individual, pre-individual *incipit*" (*Grammar* 76): a common background that precedes individuation and the production of any singularity. For Virno, this background consists of what human beings share: the biological bases of the species (sensory organs, motor skills apparatus, perception abilities), language—understood as the faculty for speaking—and the prevailing relations of production existing in a determined historical period (*Grammar* 77–78). Virno maintains that the individual is a metastable, constantly becoming "interweaving" (*Grammar* 78) of individuated and pre-individual traits, which, therefore, never leave the individual. The cohabitation between pre-individual common traits and individuated portions of the subject, Virno continues, is problematic (*Grammar* 78–79). On the one hand, the individuated "I" tends to reduce the common background to the specificity of its crystallization and makes its singularity prevail over the common. On the other hand, the "I" cannot help but feel the incompleteness of its individuation—its being part of a common ground that does not belong entirely to it—and, therefore, is simultaneously afraid of losing its specificity and strives to further its individuation. In Virno's account, which is largely indebted to the philosophy of Gilbert Simondon, the individual can find an opportunity for a "new and more radical individuation" in the collective dimension (*Grammar* 79). As Virno writes: "by participating in a collective, the subject, far from surrendering the most unique individual traits, has the

opportunity to individuate, at least in part, the share of pre-individual reality which all individuals carry within themselves” (*Grammar* 79). Participating in the collective dimension of the multitude is therefore necessary for subjects to make sense of their relation to what is common, and understand who they are at the encounter with other forms of crystallizations. In Virno’s words, “only within the collective, certainly not within the isolated subject, can perception, language, and productive forces take on the shape of an individuated experience” (*Grammar* 79). Thus, the preservation of the singular combinations of the tripartite background and the diversity of their assemblage are fundamental for the multitude to individuate itself as a political subjectivity.

Having said that, Virno’s account does not clarify how the individuation of the multitude can possibly be put into practice. He definitely grounds this process in language, as he maintains that it “is a pre-individual sphere within which is rooted the process of individuation” (*Grammar* 77). For Virno, the singularity of the individual emerges when it develops a self-aware approach to its utterance and sees them, not as a simple manifestation of its mother tongue, but as a singular enactment of the universal “faculty for speaking” (*Grammar* 77).<sup>25</sup> Virno, however, does not explore the implications of this logocentric approach in the collective dimension and, ultimately, does not explain how language may or may not foster the process of collective individuation. The linguistic practices implemented in the Manifesto strive for recreating such a collective individuation by constructing a plural genealogy for the movement. This genealogy,

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<sup>25</sup> I find Virno’s logocentric approach to the process of individuation very problematic. I cannot engage in an elaborate critique of this approach at this point in my analysis, but the next chapter will return to the discussion of the role of language in the production of subjectivity. Moreover, Virno’s assumption that the faculty for speaking is a universal and pre-individual condition of all human beings is fundamentally wrong. Not all human beings are able to speak and use their voices to produce utterances. A critique of Virno’s approach from the perspective of Disability Studies would compensate for this flaw. Finally, Virno’s definition of the multitude is problematic because it limits the process of individuation to human subjects, as will become clear from my analysis at the end of this chapter and in the next. Virno’s anthropocentric approach does not explore the possibility for developing a political project involving human and nonhuman agencies.

however, does not succeed in recognizing and fostering a political subjectivity as diverse and internally differentiated as that enacted by the material embodiments of the demonstrators.

Rather, the text focuses on the third shared foundations of the multitude mentioned above—the prevailing relations of production and power relations to which the singularities belong—and thus grounds the assemblage of the current multitude in the genealogy of past forms of exploitation and resistance.<sup>26</sup>

The singular movements presented in the text are characterized much more by their confrontation with institutional powers than by their internal coordination and cooperation to create an alternative. These forms of coordination are often presented in brief and summary statements,<sup>27</sup> except for the paragraphs dedicated to the peasants' revolts of Hans the piper, the Bundschuh (tied shoe), the Poor Conrad, and the Diggers. In the first three exceptions, the rebellion programs include some reconfigurations of sociality, such as abolishing the opponents' oppressive measures (usury, taxes and personal forms of justice), appropriating their wealth and promoting democratic forms of political representation. But it is only later in the text, in the paragraph about the English Diggers, that examples of cooperation among the members of the movement are privileged over the fight against power. Here, cooperation and organization become creative practices of resistance. The section focuses on the practices that the movement adopts in order to defend and re-appropriate the common. The Diggers occupy, dig and sow

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<sup>26</sup> Hardt and Negri are aware of this problematic aspect of current conceptions of the multitude. As the two theorists write, their argument is strongly focused on class and could be criticized for being affected by “economism” (*Multitude* 224). However, they acknowledge the desire for commonality stemming from racial and gender struggles. It is interesting to note that Hardt and Negri also reflect upon the geographical limits of the alter-global movement, whose participants are mainly from Europe and North-America (*Multitude* 87). The full exploration of the racial and gender composition of the movement is a relevant issue that, however, would bring my discourse too far from the trajectory of Wu Ming's forms of intervention.

<sup>27</sup> See “Prendemmo il Comune, riformammo arti e mestieri”; “Abolimmo il servaggio e le decime”; “L'esercito dei nobili ci accerchiò a Czanad, dov'era nata una repubblica di eguali”; “Nell'anno del Signore 1524, al grido di: “Tutte le cose sono comuni!” dichiarammo guerra all'ordine del mondo, i nostri Dodici Articoli fecero tremare i potenti d'Europa.”

common land, making it productive for the collectivity, and develop acts of sharing and common being. The Diggers do not react to aggressions and the destruction of their dwellings with military or violent actions, but they move, rebuild and re-sow. This paragraph seems to open the text up to the exploration of how the construction of an economic, social and political alternative is possible within the Empire. However, this remains a limited foray, cut short in the last sections of the text as the focus returns to the conflict between the historical manifestations of the multitude—unified by the pronoun “noi”—and power institutions, whose contemporary order is addressed with the pronoun “loro.” The structure and the linguistic form of the Manifesto contribute to reiterating this binary conflict and reducing the complex composition of each historical multitude. Each paragraph follows the aforementioned pattern of power abuses, reactions against them, repression of the rebellion and continuity of the struggle. This repetitive structure tells the genealogy of the current movement as a teleological tale, where each action or word seems to be carried out or uttered in order to propitiate today’s struggle. All these multitudes are part of the same “*marcia*,” a word that is repeated seven times throughout the text, which leads to the streets of Genoa. This structure neither erases the different practices and expressions of each movement nor encloses its actions into an eschatological destiny. Yet, the structure chains practices, expressions and actions to a pattern whose repetition makes the need to fight against power the foundational unifying element of the genealogy. This need is what the current multitude shares with the past. The repetition of the pattern is consistent with the anaphor of the pronoun “*noi*.” The anaphor channels the singularity of each movement into the subjectivity of the first-person plural narrator, making each singularity functional to the constructed contraposition with “*loro*,” the current enemy.

The linguistic contraposition of these two pronouns is consistent with the material practices embodied by the demonstrators. As I have previously mentioned, the goal of the *tute*'s march is to trespass the red zone and, therefore, contrast any neoliberal restriction of the right to demonstrate by spatially breaking it. The problem with this approach, however, consists of designing a strategy of protest negatively determined by the institutional powers that control the summit. If these powers draw a line that the movement cannot cross, crossing that line means publicly opposing this imposition and, therefore, affirming one's agency. At the same time, it implies acting within a specific framework that the same institutional powers have established. The plan to trespass the red zone materially embodies the contraposition that the linguistic practices of the text phrase as "*noi*" against "*loro*."

The political subjectivity engendered by the performative language of the Manifesto is deeply informed by this contraposition. The dichotomy "us-against-them" defines the multitude and its actions in negative terms, as constantly opposed to an institutional power. The process of construction of alternative social relations is marginal and secondary to the instances of conflict against something or someone. These fights do not promote violent resistance per se, which in reaction to power abuses can and in some cases must be justified, but privilege disruptive examples of civil disobedience over what Virno defines as "defection" ("Virtuosity" 209). For Virno, while civil disobedience is an explicit act of transgression of the law that questions its authority and the concept of obedience itself, "the breeding ground of disobedience does not lie exclusively in the social conflicts which express protest, but, and above all, in those which express defection" (*Grammar* 70). Defection is "unrestrained invention" that "modifies the conditions within which the struggle takes place ... and throws the adversary completely off balance" (*Grammar* 70). Acts of defection, then, are "acts of collective imagination" that

produce alternatives (“Virtuosity” 209). They are necessary, indeed essential, for imagining forms of interaction between singular and plural dimensions that the Empire cannot exploit or control.

As I read Virno through Hardt and Negri, I see how the acts of subversion of the imperial apparatus of social subjection must be coupled with cooperative acts of creation that escape the logic of identity and difference. From the perspective of the material practices implemented by the *tute*, the act of taking off the white overalls undermines this logic, dismissing a symbol of recognition in order for singular members to be part of the plural and diverse assemblage of the marching multitude. The marching multitude—in particular on July 21, the day after the killing of the young demonstrator Carlo Giuliani, when about three hundred thousand people gather in Genoa to protest against the brutality of the police—is a diverse and multifaceted political subjectivity whose embodied, cultural and social diversity cannot be reduced to a hegemonic identity.

The performative language of the Manifesto, however, does not succeed in entirely taking off its white overall. The form of the text experiments with articulations of singular and plural dimensions, but its strong focus on the sharing of production relations does not leave enough space for the manifestation of the singularities composing the multitudes. This constraint transforms the common condition of exploitation into an identity statement that strongly seeks to differentiate “us” from “them:” those who underwent and undergo the same abuses and those who perpetrate(d) them. The boundaries of the first-person plural political subjectivity that the Manifesto engenders, echoed by the materially embodied strategy of trespassing the red zone at all costs, are defined by the negation of what “they” do or are. Through this negation, they replicate the imperial logic of sameness and otherness. The Manifesto calls for disobedience and

counter-action, but it does not sufficiently contribute to the creation of alternative forms of relationality, which materially embodied street strategies attempted, in part, to implement.

Furthermore, the condensation of the current system of power relations into the dichotomous contraposition between the two pronouns problematizes the intervention of Wu Ming's linguistic practices in the discursive domain. As I have explained in the previous section, the Empire is structured as a network that has no boundaries, whereas the text lists a linear series of figures and institutions that do not reproduce the Empire's rhizomatic ramification. The pronoun "*loro*" seems to localize the adversary without investigating its complex internal hierarchies and differentiations. Moreover, the two pronouns, though plural, embody two distinct entities that, in the current system of power relations, are not clearly distinguishable. In this system, the members of the multitude are social subjects whose bodies, languages and desires produce wealth as part of human-machines assemblages. The imperial order depends on these assemblages and the exploitation of its singular parts. These parts compose the networks that constitute the Empire. They enact it through each singular action, and therefore the lives of the singular (non)human components of the multitude become key sites of struggle as the collective elaboration of political alternatives. As Lazzarato argues, the cooperative construction of the multitude also implies a repositioning of the singular self in ethical terms. The Manifesto blurs the boundaries between singular and plural dimensions in order to focus on how the collective multitude can react against imposed forms of social subjection. Yet, this focus prevents the text from tackling the issue of how the self is supposed to ethically reposition itself in the human-machines assemblages, in which the "*noi*" and the "*loro*" are complexly entangled.

## 2.5. New Directions in Wu Ming's Forms of Interventions

Let's now return to the map of Wu Ming's forms of intervention. Through the concepts of performativity and multitude, we can now see how the analysis of the linguistic and material practices implemented by Wu Ming and the *tute* in the Manifesto and in the streets of Genoa makes the boundaries of their intervention more definite. The analysis revealed Wu Ming's ethical commitment to experimentation with the production of an alternative political subjectivity through linguistic and materially embodied articulations of singular and plural dimensions.

However, the analysis also showed the shortcomings of Wu Ming's linguistic experiment and its negative interaction with materially embodied practices. In particular, the articulation of singularity and plurality in the Manifesto disregards the dimension of the self in favor of the collective ensemble with which it belongs. This approach does not create organizational forms of common actions as alternatives to the logic of the Empire, and does not liberate the self from the molecular forms of machinic enslavement. The text rather calls for a direct confrontation with the Empire, which was ready to employ its military force to win this confrontation through violence. During the G8, the police heavily repressed the demonstrators' initiatives and showed that the logic of "*noi*" against "*loro*" was not the most suitable to engender alternative political action. Wu Ming and the movement were unable to couple their disobedience with an imaginative act of defection that would project an alternative political subjectivity into the future.

In the aftermath of the G8, the Bolognese collective and some of their followers, who also took part in the protests, learned from this experience and worked through it together. In the days that followed the summit—after the first forty-two issues of the newsletter *Giap*—Wu Ming started a new series. The first issue of this series, published on July 26, 2001, was titled



“Genova: dal tempo del racconto al tempo del progetto” and was entirely dedicated to the events surrounding the G8. In this issue, Wu Ming members, writing individually, carry out critical analyses of the events and endorse the positive response of those activists who joined the protest the day after the killing of the demonstrator Carlo Giuliani (Friday 20 July). For Wu Ming, the embodied presence of the multitude of demonstrators was a clear signal of their shared collective mourning. It also constituted an act of defense for the common right to demonstrate. According to Wu Ming 3, these people and their decision to join the demonstration embody the ideals of sharing and cooperative action that inform the multitude. In Wu Ming 3’s view, in order to structure the code of this political subjectivity, it is from the diverse and multifaceted embodiments of these ideals that the movement has to start again: “renderlo comune [il codice]; declinarlo in ogni forma possibile; farne il volano essenziale della nuova modalità della cooperazione sociale; di un nuovo orizzonte di senso; di altre relazioni tra gli umani” (Wu Ming, *Giap*, “Genova: dal tempo”).

From the perspective of this study, the start of the new newsletter series signals Wu Ming’s need to register and take stock of a setback (if not an outright defeat) closing the first phase of their activism, but also opening a new one by reflecting on their previous experimental approaches. In this new series, the second issue of *Giap* expresses the need to transform the diverse and multifaceted embodiments of the people marching in Genoa into new linguistic and discursive forms of organization and intervention. Written by several activists who participated in the demonstrations, “Genova: una narrazione corale” is a forty-seven page long text that gathers twenty-one accounts of what happened in Genoa. These activists sent their accounts to Wu Ming by e-mail, and the collective re-arranged them in a collection of texts, a “choral narration,” that was eventually shared with all *Giap* subscribers.

From the performative perspective my analysis proposes, this collection calls for the participation of the readers in a dialogue aimed at producing an experience of reflection and confrontation from which could stem new attempts to forge an alternative political subjectivity. The aim of this document is not simply to give different accounts of the events, but to establish a necessary practice: the development of a network of communication within which each singular contribution is considered valuable. The authors and the readers of the collection perform a collective speech act whose narrative structure and linguistic expressions creatively embody alternative forms of relationality.

After a short introduction by Wu Ming, the document lists the names of all the contributors and, through hyperlinks, connects them with their respective section in the document. The structure of the collection clearly separates each contribution from the others. Each section has a different length, approach, style, tone, and embodies a singular perspective. The contributions, written in Italian or French by both male and female authors, convey different political standpoints and views on the events, the flaws in the organization of the demonstration and the police repression. Yet, the format of the collection makes all these differences part of a common assemblage. The structure of this assemblage is not organized as a linear and teleological narrative. The hyperlinks encourage readers to move through the text autonomously and tell them that the presented order of the contributions is only one possible form of experiencing them, among many others. Without any ambition of being a manifesto, this text asks the reader to experience differences and singularities acting in common. Although some information about the G8 is often repeated, these repetitions are functional to the creation of a kaleidoscopic account given from multiple perspectives. Each of these perspectives expresses a

singular agency whose singularity is fundamental for the realization of a collective narrative performance.

The linguistic form of the multi-focal narration contributes to preserving the singularity of each individual agency and keeps them from being blurred. First-person singular narrators account for the actions and thoughts of the singular authors, who also use first-person plural narrators for situating these actions into different collective ensembles. The constantly changing dynamic between “I” and “we” makes it impossible to see the latter as only one unifying linguistic body. Rather, the different “we’s” of this text should be thought of as manifestations of a multiplicity of singularities that, for Tommaso (the first contributor in the list), must not be expressed “alla prima-plurale-generica, la persona delle masse, il noi in bianco e nero, bensì in migliaia di prime persone singolari insieme, quelle che coniugano le moltitudini” (10). The contributors are also aware that the collective narrative performance they are producing can only stem from a multiplicity of singular accounts. As Dejan writes: “Scrivo un frammento che si va a unire alle centinaia di altri che circolano in questi giorni. Perché con i miei compagni voglio cucire un grande patchwork. Che venga disteso sotto gli occhi di tutti e che appaia nella sua evidenza” (17).

The choral narration critically analyzes the problems that the movement faced during the demonstrations and indirectly addresses the shortcomings of the performative language of the Manifesto. For example, Giovanni criticizes the strategy of civil disobedience and the logic of the fight (14–15), a logic that, according to the *giapster* under the pseudonym Klimt Eastwood, informed the whole strategy of the confrontation (19). Alessandro Pirani argues that the events of the G8 constitute a massive crisis, “perché la risposta del movimento non ha saputo coerentemente organizzare un’alternativa al vertice dei G8. Il cosiddetto movimento purtroppo

continua a vivere in uno stato di subordinazione totale alle logiche ad esso avverso” (24).

However, all the contributors do not only comment or reflect on the mistakes of the movement, but also wonder about its potentialities and what it should do next. For a contributor, it is necessary to understand “cosa è stata Genova per il movimento, quali sono le strategie degli altri e se abbiamo fatto degli errori a cui possiamo porre rimedio” (12). While Serge Quadrupani criticizes the lack of imagination in planning the strategies of the confrontation—the demonstrators, he says, “obsédées par l’imagerie de l’assaut à la forteresse, ... n’ont pas su utiliser à fond leur principale ressource, leur imagination”—he also claims that his critiques “ne visent qu’à faire avancer la réflexion collective pour la suite” (43).

How, then, is one supposed to develop this reflection? It is interesting to note that both Wu Ming followers and the members of the collective give self-aware and well thought-out answers to this question. They argue for the need to engender alternative forms of material, linguistic and discursive intervention. One needs to prevent the Empire from appropriating discourses and practices, emptying them of their emancipatory potential and subsuming them. As Gabriele argues in his contribution:

più difficile diventa immaginare e realizzare forme di antagonismo, da abbandonare magari non appena hanno successo, come difficile è capire in tempo il momento della sussunzione ... Ne è un altro esempio il linguaggio: i capi di governo e i media si appropriano delle terminologie dei movimenti di protesta senza spostare di un millimetro la sostanza delle loro azioni. Come si fa a combattere una battaglia sul linguaggio? (39)

For Wu Ming 1 the logic of the struggle and its linguistic terms have to change. As he writes in the essay “Lingua di legno,” which he published in November 2001 on the collective’s website,

the movement has to dismiss words like disobedience, multitude and Empire. These expressions have deteriorated because of their inappropriate use in relation to any form of protest after the G8, any collective ensemble of individuals or masses and any kind of Western imperialism. As he writes: “si disobbedisce al padre-padrone, o allo stato-padrone. È un’espressione che riporta alla vecchia società disciplinare, che invece è diventata qualcos’altro, qualcosa di più sottile e integrato: la società del controllo, un fitto reticolo di classificazioni, controlli, autocensure, criteri di accettabilità, macchine che vedono.”

Where should I situate these self-aware reflections in my cartography? How do they help me follow the trajectory of Wu Ming’s interventions? Although, for Wu Ming 1, disobedience, Empire and multitude have become problematic terms, in my view, the theoretical questions that inform these concepts remain helpful. If there is no central power that one can disobey, which practices do Wu Ming implement in order to produce biopolitical forms of resistance to power abuses? How do these practices inspire acts of defection and imaginative construction of an alternative within the current system of power relations? And finally, how does Wu Ming’s ethically informed discourse evolve toward a more sustainable articulation of plurality and singularity?

My analysis of the collective narration published on *Giap* has partially answered these questions. Differently from the manifesto, the choral narration performatively produces relations, confrontations and exchanges between different singularities that value their being different. The meaning of this collective experience does not stem from the identity claims of a unifying narrative voice or a dichotomous confrontation, but, quoting Hardt and Negri’s words about Bakhtin’s polyphonic conception of narrative, “it arises only out of the exchanges among all the singularities in dialogue” (*Multitude* 211). Wu Ming partake in making these exchanges possible

by composing the collection. The act of composition contributes to building the dialogic assemblage that conveys the ethical need for acknowledging the contribution of each singular agency.

The construction of plural dialogic assemblages as a form of intervention in the current system of power relations is, therefore, a direction of Wu Ming's activism that my cartography is expected to follow across the literary paths and transmedia networks analysed in the next two chapters. The content and structure of the "narrazione corale," however, also point to a different direction Wu Ming do not address, or, at least, do not fully elaborate at this stage of their activism: post-anthropocentric agency. The reflections of Claudio, one of the contributors, and the role the hyperlinks play in structuring the reading experience open the plurality of agencies that participate in the enactment of the dialogic dimension of the *Giap* issue to the contribution of nonhuman actors (i.e., instruments and tools).

In his writings, Claudio reflects upon his being part of the multitude and wonders what he can actually do to support it. He finds the answer in the instrument that allows him to tell the story of that multitude:

Ero arrivato a Genova da solo, e mi sono ritrovato tra migliaia di compagni. Nessun casco, maschera, occhiale. Prima manifestazione. La mia macchina fotografica, quella sì. Grazie a lei ho potuto fare ordine nella mia testa, e anche nella testa di chi a Genova non c'era. Raccontare ciò che accade, depositarlo nella Memoria. Questo "io" posso fare. Certo, i pestaggi su inermi dei macellai bluestiti, lo spavento, i lacrimogeni ad altezza d'uomo, ma ancor di più il racconto della MOLTITUDINE. Varia, ospitale, "intelligente." Immensa. Soltanto se non abbracci questa moltitudine puoi sentirti solo. (37)

Claudio, as a singular component of the multitude, contributes to the demonstration by producing narratives and memories of the struggle. The products of his actions, however, are not engendered by an independent and essentially humanist agency, but rather from an agential “I” whose boundaries are questioned. The boundaries of Claudio’s agency blur, as the camera empowers him and allows him to create pictures and narratives. The camera, one of the “machines who see” about which Wu Ming 1 writes in his essay, is a fundamental component of Claudio’s agency as it co-determines what he can do. Yet, this machine does not enslave Claudio. Instead, together with him, it builds an assemblage of human and machinic agencies programmatically aimed at undermining manifestations of abusive power.

In fact, a wide range of machinic agencies play a key role in enabling the enactment of the choral narration as a collective speech act and informing the dialogic relationship between the different singularities that participate in it. Contemporary digital technologies and the Internet allow Wu Ming to receive, re-arrange and share the singular contributions, making them a collective performance. From this vantage point, it becomes possible to see how, in its very structure, the compilation of contributions has nonhuman agencies at its core, and how these agencies have the power to affect reception. The *Giap* issue makes the hyperlink a constitutive component of the text that conditions the modalities of its reading. The hyperlink interacts with both the text and the reader, allowing the latter to experience the former in unpredictable ways. The hyperlink is a technological expression of relationality that actively structures the internal dynamic between each singular contribution and the whole collection. Its nonhuman agency shapes and informs the dialogic dimension where a composition of singular (non)human actors constitute a plural assemblage.

Barad's ontology provides the frame to help fully grasp the significance of Claudio's thoughts and the agency of the hyperlink. Her theory provides a signpost for the two entangled directions that the trajectory of Wu Ming's forms of intervention take in the aftermath of the G8. The signpost concerns Wu Ming's construction of plural dialogic assemblages as a form of intervention that aims to produce an alternative political subjectivity. In Barad's terminology, the dialogic exchange of the *Giap* issue is a material and discursive phenomenon that human and nonhuman agencies contribute to enact. Here, underlining the role that nonhuman entities (i.e., the camera, the hyperlink) play is essential in order to point to the humanist limits of the plural dialogic assemblage of the *Giap* issue. The issue strives to engender an alternative political subjectivity through the dialogue of essentially human singularities and relies on exchanges that privilege linguistic manifestations of agency over the material. The plurality of agencies that the issue considers is therefore enclosed within a humanist domain that does not fully consider the relevance of matter and (non)human embodiments in the production of subjectivity. By adopting Barad's perspective we can appreciate that Claudio's thoughts call for a post-anthropocentric conception of the singularities that contribute to the enactment of speech acts. We can also see that Wu Ming has created an opportunity for this call to emerge, but is not yet able to recognize and answer this call and the ethical potential it contains.

In the next chapters, I will show how Wu Ming will learn to respond to the claims of nonhuman agencies and, in this way, overcome the limitations of anthropocentric approaches to the construction of plural dialogic assemblages. The collective's response will take two entangled directions. They will insist on the elaboration of these assemblages in their novels (Chapter 3) and across transmedia networks (Chapter 4). They will also increasingly take ethico-political positions aimed at imagining, considering and exploring the contribution of nonhuman



agencies to these assemblages. As the surveyor, I am about to fold this part of the map and unfold the sections where literary paths and networks appear. My challenge will be to follow these two directions, unpack their entanglement and map how Wu Ming's material, linguistic and discursive practices engage in the exploration of post-anthropocentric approaches.

## Chapter 3

### The Production of Subjectivity in Wu Ming's Literary Forms of Expression

#### Introduction

The analysis of the Manifesto in the previous chapter revealed that, from a theoretically informed perspective, the primary aim of Wu Ming's early activism was to intervene in the system of power relations that controls the production of contemporary subjectivities. Wu Ming's performative interventions are based on a clear-cut ethico-political stance: they challenge the neoliberal apparatuses of social subjection and machinic enslavement, which control the process of subjectivation, in order to engender an alternative political subjectivity. Their initial strategy, however, was flawed. Their implementation of performative language in the Manifesto does not engender a plural political subjectivity, while the construction of a plural dialogic dimension in "Genova: una narrazione corale" lacks thorough reflection upon the material and discursive performativity of nonhuman agencies, which neoliberal machinic networks enslave as well. The conception of performativity—and its role in the production of subjectivity—that emerges from Wu Ming's early interventions is fundamentally logocentric and anthropocentric and, therefore, problematic, as it is not up to the task of engendering an alternative to the contemporary forms of enslavement which involve human *and* nonhuman agencies.

A core assumption, however, lies underneath these considerations, one perhaps I have taken for granted so far: in addition to preserving the agency of human singularities, a viable political project must also acknowledge and include the agential contribution of nonhuman singularities. Why is that the case? This is a question this whole study strives to answer. What

we must immediately understand at this stage of analysis is that the construction of a post-anthropocentric political alternative should not be reduced to a challenge to what neoliberalism is already able to do, namely produce machinic networks of subjectivation and enslave them. We should not, in other words, establish alternative (non)human networks of collaborations simply because we aim to negate neoliberal apparatuses of enslavement. Otherwise, the scope of our intervention would once again run the risk of being determined by what neoliberal apparatuses already do.

On the contrary, the scope of this intervention should be affirmative, much broader, and grounded in both cognitive and ethical foundations. On the one hand, given Barad's ontology, the material and discursive configurations of the world are constituted by human *and* nonhuman actors. Therefore, any well-thought out strategy that seeks to change these configurations must make a cognitive effort and consider the nonhuman dimension. On the other hand, this cognitive effort should stem from ethical grounds informed by a Spinozist and Levinassian conception of ethics.<sup>28</sup> From a Spinozist perspective, we, as autopoietic subjects, maximise our possibilities and being—i.e., we realize ourselves, we fulfil our desires—by opening ourselves to and multiplying our relations with the world and its (non)human constituents. Our possibilities depend on our actions promoting affirmative entanglements (i.e., entanglements that multiply and further relations) with others, human and nonhuman, for which we are responsible, in a Levinassian sense, because our responses to them contribute to determine their subjectivity. Conversely, others' responses determine my subjectivity and shape me as a subject. Therefore, human and nonhuman entities are reciprocally entangled in the production of their subjectivities. It is

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<sup>28</sup> The proposal I make in this paragraph draws on Eugenio Bolongaro's seminal article "Between Plenitude and Responsibility: Notes on Ethics and Contemporary Literature." In this article, Bolongaro identifies in a synergistic reading of the ethics of Spinoza, Deleuze and Levinas a key theoretical step for the understanding of contemporary literary trends and a new definition of literature as an ethical encounter. For a reinterpretation of Spinoza in a post-humanist key, see also the works of Rosi Braidotti, in particular *The Posthuman* and *Posthuman Knowledge*.

because of our intra-active entanglements with (non)human others and the way the formation of affirmative entanglements fosters and expands the production of subjectivity that a political alternative should be grounded in a post-anthropocentric ethics and therefore consider the agency of nonhuman singularities.

Karen Barad's post-humanist eco-centric ontology is a key theoretical tool for understanding the nonhuman dimension and, more specifically for our purposes, what nonhuman agencies are and how they intervene in the material-discursive phenomena that produce subjectivity. In her post-humanist definition, agency is not a fixed attribute, a possession; it is a doing, a performative process that results from the specific entanglements of matter and discourse in singular phenomena. Her notion of entanglement is different from a banal interaction between independent and autonomous entities that exist prior to their relation.

Entanglements are rather *intra*-active processes through which "the boundaries and properties of the components of phenomena become determinate and particular" and "material articulations of the world become meaningful" (139). Agency is enacted within intra-actions and manifests itself in the ongoing material-discursive reconfiguring of the world. As "the space of agency is not restricted to the possibilities for human action" (178), Barad uses her conception of agency to redefine matter as an agential, ongoing and dynamic process of becoming that is not a fixed, passive or transcendental essence, but has a say in the production and enactment of discursive practices and subjectivity. Material-discursive entanglements and intra-actions, in other words, produce the conditions of emergence of the subject, while, conversely, the subject participates in the enactment of these conditions and therefore in the entanglements that bring them about. How are Barad's definitions of agency and matter to affect our understanding of the production of subjectivity? How is her ontology changing our conception of the speech act, which, she argues,

is not a discursive practice “bearing some unspecified relationship to material practices” (149), but one that is rooted in the material dimension? And how does her definition of performativity illuminate the new strategies that Wu Ming implemented in response to the shortcomings of their early activism?

This chapter will answer these questions by, first, discussing Lazzarato’s critique of logocentric definitions of performativity and his theory of production of subjectivity; and, second, by analysing the trajectory of Wu Ming’s experimental articulations of this process in their literary texts. Lazzarato’s theory is a cornerstone of my argument insofar as it treats subjectivation from a post-humanist perspective that values the agency of matter, and its affective manifestations, in the performance of the speech act and the production of subjectivity. Moreover, Lazzarato adds an insightful investigation to Barad’s theory. It explores how the production of alternative political subjectivities—what indeed Wu Ming strive for—is fostered by a constant feedback between ethico-political acts of self-positioning in (non)human dialogic dimensions and aesthetic (i.e., materially embodied and experimental) explorations of other existential territories. The analysis of Wu Ming’s literary texts will follow the trajectory of aesthetic experiments and explorations that are not only informed by their initial ethico-political stance (e.g., building an alternative to neoliberalism), but also ultimately performatively enact and foster it.

Wu Ming’s literary texts are a particular speech act that, as Lazzarato and Barad would have it, is deeply entangled with its ethico-political stance and material practices. Literary paths are the territory that Wu Ming have privileged in their twenty years of activism and therefore occupy a pivotal position in their project. This explains why my cartography will linger here—see the density and length of this chapter—and explore closely the possibilities these paths open.

It is necessary to analyse Wu Ming's literary texts in order to understand how they (a) imaginatively envision alternative relationalities and subjectivities and actualize them in language; (b) encourage the reader to engage in this imaginary endeavour; and (c) use this imagination to make sense of complex networks of material and discursive agencies that constitute subjects and relations, and therefore also provide the reader with the opportunity of a new cognitive experience.

Wu Ming's implementation of the imaginary and cognitive potential of literature opens a set of possibilities. This chapter organizes them around four clusters: (a) the possibility for the text to articulate plurivocal dialogic dimensions whose plurality values and respects the human singularities constituting it; (b) the possibility for literary forms of expression to articulate dialogic dimensions where the exchanges are not necessarily verbalized, but affective, and the participants to the dialogue are not exclusively human; (c) the possibility for these forms to produce an understanding of the machinic networks of human and nonhuman agencies that neoliberal apparatuses enslave, while also presenting Wu Ming's self-conscious attempts to constantly deepen such an understanding; and, (d) the possibility for the literary text to break out of its own boundaries, consciously entering in these machinic networks and instilling the need for embodied forms of engagement (i.e., ways of *tenere il culo in strada*) in its readers. These are the four major steps in Wu Ming's response to the need of imagining and implementing the most effective forms of expression for a post-anthropocentric approach to the production of subjectivity.

### 3.1. Rethinking the Speech Act with Lazzarato

In Chapter 2, my analysis of the production of subjectivity in the current system of power relations specified that the process operates through discursive and pre-discursive apparatuses, what Lazzarato respectively names social subjection and machinic enslavement, and that language contributes to this production by both empowering and constraining the subject. Butler's conception of performativity illuminates how language produces subjectivity through the dynamics of interpellation. However, she confines the possibilities for subverting these dynamics, and consequently producing alternative subjectivities, within the discursive domain. For Butler, the subject produces innovative subject positions by appropriating linguistic and bodily practices imposed on her by discourse and subverting or parodying them. The subject therefore responds with subversive performances to institutionally codified speech acts that produce her subjectivity, yet the scope of these performances is determined by the discursive boundaries of the original imposition. Insofar as Butler confines subversive practices within the discursive domain, her conception cannot help us understand how neoliberal apparatuses enslave subjects in the pre-discursive domain and, consequently, how alternative subjectivities can be produced. The theoretical issue at the centre of this section therefore involves two questions: how one can intervene at the level of machinic enslavement and what is the role of speech acts in this intervention.

A more detailed analysis of Lazzarato's proposal for alternative forms of production of subjectivity, briefly introduced in the previous chapter, will help answer these two questions. Key aspects of Lazzarato's theory for understanding subjectivation and my analysis of Wu Ming's interventions can be summarized into several parts. The production of an alternative subjectivity must be grounded in an ethico-political act of self-positioning that precedes codified

forms of expression in the discursive domain. This self-positioning act occurs within machinic dialogic dimensions. These are assemblages of plural (non)human agencies affecting the production of forms of self-expression, including speech acts, to which the self also responds. These forms of affection provoke a reaction that is not primarily cognitive—understood in a Kantian vein as a rational, scientific understanding of knowledge—but rather aesthetic and existential. This reaction is characterized by the encounter with others in terms of unpredictable affects, percepts, further acts of self-positioning and forms of expression. According to Lazzarato, such an experience bridges the pre-discursive and the discursive dimension and opens a space of possibilities within the domain of subjectivity production that contemporary neoliberal apparatuses seek to control.

In order to ground the speech act in the pre-discursive dimension, Lazzarato re-defines this concept and its role in the production of subjectivity. Drawing on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Félix Guattari, the Italian philosopher criticizes logocentric approaches to the concept of performativity and proposes a revision of speech act theory. The latter focuses on enunciation, the intra-active and materially grounded moment of the utterance, rather than on language as grammar, a system of codified signs or a performative generator of institutionalized responses. Lazzarato, in other words, explores a non-logocentric definition of language, one that does not conceive of linguistic signs as referents for an external reality, but as components of machinic assemblages that intervene in and produce it (*Signs* 80–83). In Austin's terminology, Lazzarato shifts the attention from the illocutionary act, which is confined within conventional exchanges, to the perlocutionary act, which linguists have largely disregarded because of its indefinite contours (Lazzarato, *Signs* 272). The perlocutionary act results from a composition of linguistic and embodied extra-linguistic forces (e.g., gestures, intonation, affects) that make its



study problematic from a logocentric perspective. For Lazzarato, the analysis of the perlocutionary act and its dynamics as enunciation is key to understanding the entanglement of discursive and non-discursive actors that produce subjectivity and potentially emancipate it from neoliberal apparatuses.

According to the Italian philosopher, the enunciation takes place in a dialogic dimension that generates “relations of sense expressed through language and signs” that “yet remain irreducible to either” (*Signs* 178). In this dimension, “language constitutes a necessary but not sufficient element” that needs supplements to perform a complete speech act (*Signs* 178). The supplement can be a particular emotional affect, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes about shame (4), or a set of affects and materially grounded (non)human agencies that Lazzarato, with Guattari, calls “ethico-political” (*Signs* 218) or “existential” (*Signs* 203).<sup>29</sup> As Guattari explains, existential forces—molecular, affective, ethical drives pulling us toward the other—permeate means of expression, life flows and connections between human *and* nonhuman beings (in Lazzarato, *Signs* 203). As enunciations, speech acts actualize these forces and connections in the dialogic dimension, where every speech act “is addressed to someone or something...and presupposes a ‘response’ (or a ‘responsive attitude’).” The response “is a constitutive element of the utterance,” one that is not predictable and cannot be reduced to the formulation of intelligible linguistic propositions (*Signs* 179).

The following example should clarify Lazzarato’s conception of response by illuminating the complex entanglements of (non)human agencies that respond to each-other and intra-act in the dialogic dimension. Identifying my response to the question “Do you believe in God?” with a

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<sup>29</sup> The use of the adjective “existential” is here to be understood in its etymological sense, as *stance forth* (from the latin *ex-sistere*) or *toward* the other. The other and its relation to the self, as a long tradition of existentialist philosophy would have it, are constitutive entities in the production of subjectivity. See, among other seminal and foundational works, Heidegger’s *Being and Time*; Sartre’s *L’existentialisme est un humanisme*; Levinas’ *Alterité et transcendence*; and Nancy’s *Being Singular Plural*.

mere linguistic answer would disregard a whole set of reactions to the (non)human elements of the dialogic dimension. As I formulate an answer, my “I” does not coincide with the individual, autonomous subject envisaged by humanism, but rather with a plural composition of molecules, affects and discursive practices that run through and constitute me as a constantly evolving trajectory. I *respond* to the material setting of the dialogue (e.g., a church, a classroom, a bar), the social position of the person asking me (e.g., a priest, a student, a judge) or the contingent *presence* of (non)human others (e.g., my mother, a copy of *On the Origin of Species* on my desk, an indefinite quantity of whisky in my body). These responses—and here I need to refer to Barad’s ontology to make sense of their significance—are the result of intra-actions between the material and discursive components of the dialogic dimension. My enunciation, therefore, is not the exclusive product of a rational, autonomous and ultimately humanist subject, but a phenomenon that a singular assemblage of (non)human agencies, including human enunciator and responder, co-produce. Through the enunciation, I actualize my position in this assemblage and crystallize my ethical, affective and molecular positioning in the discursive domain.

The subject’s singular, unpredictable and irreproducible set of responses constitutes an act of self-positioning that situates her in a relational network of discursive and pre-discursive agencies. The enunciator positions herself in this network and produces forms of expressions (i.e., speech acts) that engender further responses, speech acts and acts of self-positioning. The enunciator does not partake passively in the dialogic relation, but actively “establishes its dynamics and orients its actualization” (Lazarato, *Signs* 181). The enunciation, Lazarato argues, “represents a ‘micro-politics’ and/or ‘micro-physics’ of relation between speakers” (*Signs* 181) that enact, and do not simply represent, the dialogic dimension and its internal political relations. As he argues, the “enunciation is a co-production of a polemical and/or

cooperative co-actualization of linguistic virtualities, worlds of values, and the existential territories in which they occur” (*Signs* 181). The speech act is therefore an “event which creates indetermination by opening possibilities that ‘subjectively’ engage speakers in a singular relation,” dialogic dimension and political relationality (*Signs* 181).

The act of self-positioning and its manifestation as speech act/enunciation produce subjectivity as they generate “the ensemble of conditions which render possible the emergence of individual and/or collective” subjectivities in constant relation “to an alterity that is itself subjective” (Guattari, *Chaosmosis* 9). The participation of the self in the dialogic dimension is therefore a form of self-constitution, autopoiesis, and “active production of subjectivity by the subject itself” (O’Sullivan 262). This holds insofar as one defines the subject as a relational and processual entity that does not coincide with a rationally determined individual and is produced in and by her relation to and entanglement with others. The subject’s self-positioning in the dialogic dimension is an exploratory and experimental process of self-location in a complex assemblage of (non)human agencies that initiate the process of subjectivation at the molecular level.

The complex set of responses that compose the autopoietic act are not confined within a cognitive process. The autopoietic act, as Lazzarato and Simon O’Sullivan argue through Guattari, is a self-creative experience that produces experiential, affective, physical knowledge within an aesthetic paradigm. In this paradigm “we become the authors of our own subjectivities” (O’Sullivan 263), but the results of our actions are not “separate and isolated monads, for such an autopoietic folding is always accompanied by an allopoietic function in which a given subject maintains lines of connection” with (non)human others (Guattari, *Chaosmosis* 114). The autopoietic subject maintains these lines of connection by taking ethico-

political positions that open the self to collective creations of alternative subjectivities and ultimately constitute the ethical ground on which a new political project must be built (Lazzarato, *Signs* 210).

The aesthetic paradigm is a procedural, processual, operative framework for the self to creatively relate to the world and embody such post-anthropocentric ethics. Within this framework, the subject is able to experience post-humanist forms of knowledge that re-discover the potential of materially embodied encounters; explore alternative existential territories; and temporarily crystallize them in forms of expressions. In this paradigm, the function of speech acts is “to signify, communicate, and declare politically.” They intervene in the discursive domain, but also “produce assemblages of enunciation able to capture, territorialize and deploy the singularities of a focal point of existential subjectivation and give consistency to them” (Lazzarato, *Signs* 204). Speech acts, in other words, actualize and make available at the cognitive level the entanglements of pre-discursive intensities—the focal points of existential subjectivation—that intra-act in dialogic phenomena and enact the production of subjectivity. In order to give consistency to these focal points, speech acts must reinitiate discourse and crystallize subjectivation processes into stories, narratives and maps that “serve as a cartography for localization and access to process of subjectivation and to existential territories” (Lazzarato, *Signs* 211).

Lazzarato’s conception of the production of subjectivity and the function of speech acts in this process offers an invaluable theoretical tool for analysing how Wu Ming’s experiments with narrative forms of expressions can actualize the exploration of alternative existential territories, forms of (non)human relationality and co-existence.

### 3.2. Plurivocal Dialogic Dimensions in *54* and *L'armata dei sonnambuli*

Wu Ming's linguistic experiments with literary forms of expressions actualize dialogic assemblages of enunciation and the exploration of alternative existential territories through the implementation of two essential forms: first-person plural narrators and narrative perspectives. The voices of *we* narrators in the novels *54* and *L'armata dei sonnambuli*—the focus in this section—articulate plural assemblages of enunciation that ask the reader to imagine collective subjectivities where the participation of human singularities (e.g., characters, the reader) is valued and acknowledged. These assemblages, however, do not include nonhuman singularities. Neither do they explore forms of pre-verbal responses and exchanges in which (non)human agencies intra-act, unless one focuses on the *perspective* or *standpoint* of these narrators—the constantly becoming position from which they relate to the world—rather than merely on the structure of their enunciation.

I anticipate here an issue that I will tackle in section three regarding the limits of Lazzarato's theory of the dialogic dimension for understanding entanglements of intra-acting (non)human agencies and their manifestation in Wu Ming's literary works. Assuming the enunciation actualizes fluxes of affective forces running at the pre-discursive level of the dialogic exchange, the analysis of narrative voices does not account for the dynamic of these forces and the connections they create in the pre-discursive dimension. Rather, it is the analysis of narrative perspectives—the main focus of the next section—that will help illuminate Wu Ming's experimental articulations of these connections and the complex set of pre-discursive responses that initiate the production of subjectivity. That analysis will also unveil Wu Ming's reflections upon a post-anthropocentric form of performativity, one not necessarily actualized in language but rather inscribed in matter and its agential reconfigurations.

Returning to Wu Ming's use of *we* narrators, I should note that recent studies in narrative theory variously investigate the modalities in which first-person plural narrators problematize the relationship between individual and collective dimension, as well as the articulation of singular and plural discourses in a dialogic context (Marcus; Margolin; Richardson). For Richardson, *we* narrators have the potential to bring about multifaceted collective subjectivities (210) whose boundaries, as Marcus argues, can be more or less fluid (2–3). Within these ambiguous boundaries, the relationship between individual and collective voices can be articulated in authoritative, disorienting or polyphonic ways (Marcus 154). According to Margolin, *we* narrators run the risk of, on the one hand, “treating plural states or actions...as a pure sum of individual ones,” thereby sacrificing “collective properties and configurations.” On the other hand, and as the analysis of the G8 Manifesto showed in the previous chapter, an excessive focus on these configurations would efface singular agencies' contributions to the plural whole (Margolin 600).

The analysis of *we* narrators in *54* and *L'armata* will reveal whether and how the problematic experience of the Manifesto and the choral design of the *Giap* issue helped Wu Ming to, first, revise their understanding of how singular and plural dimensions should be linguistically expressed, and, second, elaborate alternative articulations of these dimensions in their literary enactment of collective subjectivities. Both novels' *we* narrators present similar approaches. Therefore, it is useful to begin by briefly introducing both narratives and then proceed to a comparative analysis.

Entirely set in the year 1954, the plot of *54* (2002) consists of multiple and variously interlaced stories, each one involving a multitude of characters and settings, from Russia to the United States, the Balkans and France, from Trieste to Naples and Bologna. These stories

represent key aspects of 1950s Italian society. These can be summarized as the internal division between Communists and Christian Democrats; Italy's delicate position between the Eastern and Western blocs during the Cold War; traces of the fascist past; and, finally, the early influence of television and cinema on Italian popular culture. An extra-diegetic narrative voice is prevalent throughout the book. The third-person singular narrator is not omniscient but rather borrows the points of view of central or marginal characters, some human (i.e., the young Robespierre 'Pierre' Capponi or the actor Cary Grant) and some nonhuman (e.g., the McGuffin Electric TV set, or pigeons).

The chapters set in the Aurora bar in Bologna constitute an exception to this third-person pattern as they feature a first-person plural narrator. As Wu Ming 1 writes, "il bar Aurora è il ritrovo di comunisti, partigiani, vecchi antifascisti a suo tempo mandati al confino, ma anche giovani che passano prima di andare a ballare, gente che viene solo per giocare la schedina, varia umanità" ("NIE" 28). The bar is a trans-generational and trans-class environment where no singular figure—even the two managers, Pierre and his brother Nicola—assumes a central role as a character. The plural ensemble of the bar, to which the *we* narrator gives voice, must be conceived as a character in itself or, to use Margolin's terminology, as a "Collective Narrative Agent" (592). From a thematic perspective, this CNA finds elements of unifications in communist ideology, memories of the war and the passion for popular cultural phenomena like cycling competitions and soccer.

*L'armata dei sonnambuli* (2014) is set in France during the last years of the French Revolution, from the execution of King Louis XVI in January 1793, to the restauration of a conservative leadership in the *Termidoro* period (January 1795). As in 54, the novel is divided into multiple narratives built around six main characters. These include the reactionary chevalier

d'Yvers (initially concealed behind the nickname Laplace), the knitter Marie Nozière, the hypnotist Orphée D'Amblanc, the Italian actor Léo Modonesi and, finally, a collective character that can be identified as the multitude of sans-culottes living in the faubourg St. Antoine. The structure of the novel is divided into acts and scenes, as if the spectacle of the Revolution were represented in a theatre. The Revolution is a stage where revolutionary, reformist and reactionary forces are at play. The sans-culottes, Marie, Léo and D'Amblanc try to hinder the Thermidorian involution and fight against an army of mesmerized sleepwalkers controlled by the chevalier d'Yvers. In this theatrical context, a first-person plural narrator lends its voice to the multitude of the sans-culottes and, as in the Aurora bar example, speaks for this collective subjectivity.

The collective voice of these plural narrators is radically different from the hegemonic instance of the *noi* of the Manifesto. The narrative enunciation enacts a dialogic dimension where the singular contributions of its human participants (e.g., their singular utterances) are given space and acknowledged. The assemblage of these contributions engenders a plural, internally complex and articulated subjectivity whose plurality and internal stratifications are maintained and preserved by the formal elaboration of plurivocal dialogic sequences. In 54, for example, the narrator constantly reports the bar regulars' voices in indirect speech ("qualcuno ha urlato che gliela venissero mica a raccontare a lui, quella storia" (37)) or direct speech ("Lascia stare la memoria,' si scalda Bottone. 'È che nel '27 c'era ancora qualcuno che la spalava'" (38)), giving therefore space to their singular expression. However, the narrative enunciation is reluctant to intrude into the characters' minds; it is not omniscient and rather infers the characters' thoughts from their behaviour. Also, the narrator of the Aurora bar seems to not participate in the dialogues it reports. Nonetheless, at times it intervenes and *responds* to the characters' enunciations using the technique of free indirect speech. In the following example,



Bortolotti, Bottone, Garibaldi and Walterùn are talking about Pierre's bad mood on that particular day:

Mentre Pierre è nell'altra stanza, Bortolotti molla le bocce e si unisce al nostro tavolo.

– Avete visto Pierre com'è ridotto? M'han detto che l'altro giorno, al Settimo cielo, non è andata bene come il solito.

– Ah, ecco, si vede che in Jugoslavia s'è scordato il frullone! Allora non è mica grave, chiamalo, dàì, che proviamo a metterlo di buon umore.

– Lascia perdere, Walterùn, mi sa che oggi è il giorno di San Grugnone, non c'è niente da fare.

Ha ragione Bortolotti, a 'sto punto meglio lasciarli cuocere nel loro brodo, quei due, e pensare piuttosto a questa cosa del televisore, che la Coppa del mondo si avvicina, e l'Italia non sarà un granché, ma intanto ha fatto 3 a 1 coi francesi, e ci gioca pure Cappello, che è uno dei nostri, uno del Bologna, come ai tempi di Schiavio. Insomma, di sicuro ne vale la pena, poi c'è caso che anche i due fratelli musoni, con la sorpresa del Tv, si facciano trascinare dall'euforia.

O almeno si spera. (396)

The first three lines of direct speech report the exchange between Bortolotti and Walterùn, but it is not clear to which figure the thoughts that close the passage belong. They could arguably be the reflections of a narrator that comments on the characters' utterances from a position external to the dialogue. However, the narrator shares with the characters the concerns about the purchase of a TV set and the excitement for watching the soccer matches of the Italian team at the upcoming World Cup. The narrator's words or thoughts are stylistically similar to the previous

dialogic sequence, an evident trait of all the Aurora bar chapters. The narrative voice is close to the unfolding of the events and does in fact assume a position internal to the narrative space of the bar from which it *responds* to the characters' enunciation in free indirect speech. This response, however, does not belong to any "I" or individual figure. Indeed, throughout all chapters of the Aurora bar there is no "I" or first-person singular narrative sequence to which the collective voice can be linked. The response is collective, shared, and blurs any rigid separation between the singular characters and the collective narrator—and by blurring here I mean that in any given dialogue each singular "I" can flow in or out of the collective "we."

In *L'armata dei sonnambuli*, the complexity of the articulation of the narrator's response and the dialogic dimension where it takes place increases; the narrator's voice is not confined within the space of a bar and seems to directly address the characters in sequences of direct speech. The tale of the *vox plebis*, as Wu Ming called it in an interview with Enrico Manera (Manera), is structured as a prolonged conversation. The chapters dedicated to this tale often start with locutions that seem to respond to something just said ("È che al principio di quel mese, la rivoluzione ha cambiato pure il calendario" (491)); summarize a previous discourse ("Insomma, dicono che l'abbiamo gagnata noialtri" (205); "Dice che l'ultima volta..." (394)); or answer a question ("Noi te lo si conta, ma mica c'eravamo" (128)). During this conversation, the first-person plural narrator leaves space for the direct speech of multiple voices or reports what others say, in indirect speech or paraphrases, similar to the Aurora bar narrator. However, unlike the 54 bar narrative, dialogic sequences are not framed by definite spatio-temporal boundaries nor is the speakers' identity always specified. In *L'armata*, the context of the reported dialogues does not coincide with a limited physical space, but extends across squares, crowds, neighborhoods,

streets and taverns. During these dialogues, one reads lines of pure enunciation, direct speech, voices that come from speakers that can be close, far, anywhere or everywhere.

In *L'armata*, the narrator's position in these dialogues constitutes a further innovation, as it directly interacts with the characters' voices. The lack of a clear identification of the speakers involved in the dialogues makes it difficult to distinguish between the voice of the characters and that of the narrator, as if the latter's words were also reported in direct speech:

La rivoluzione, ha detto una volta Machand...

– E chi sarebbe?

– Un arrotino del Pantano. La rivoluzione, diceva... (554)

Conversely, other voices internal to the diegetic space engage with the tale of the *vox plebis*, asking questions about what the narrator says, making comments or expressing opinions:

La rivoluzione, diceva Trabant...

– Arrotino pure lui?

Maniscalco. Del foborgo San Germano. La rivoluzione, diceva, è un carnevale più lungo del consueto, che si slunga fino a contenere la quaresima, la resurrezione, tutto quanto.

– Parecchio filosofi, i maniscalchi di San Germano. (556)

The voice of the first-person plural narrator here directly contributes to the enactment of the dialogue, making the entanglement between singular and plural dimension of its collective subjectivity even denser than in *54*.

Furthermore, the use of the present tense in chapters where *we* narrators speak stands out in sharp contrast to the past tense used in the rest of the two novels. The present tense invites the reader to perceive these dialogic exchanges as a processual evolution, a performative set of

relations in the making. These exchanges do not simply express a collective subjectivity that is essentially *there* before the dialogues take place, but bring it about performatively through the intra-actions of the agencies involved. In *54*, these dialogic intra-actions find a codified form of expression in the Rule of the bar. At the Aurora, the topics of conversation may vary:

Ma non è tanto importante di cosa si discute, o chi lo fa, basta rispettare sempre la  
Regola: non si parla sottovoce, se devi bisbigliare in un angolo vai a confessarti dal  
prete, non vieni qui, che non interessa a nessuno. Qui si parla a tre, a quattro, a volte  
il bar intero, perché ci sono questioni come il ciclismo o la politica che scaldano gli  
animi e fanno alzar la voce. (40)

The Rule acknowledges the key function of dialogic exchanges occurring as part of bar life. And, more interestingly, it aligns the regulars' approach to these exchanges (i.e., the obligation to speak loudly) with the affective forces that run across the speakers' bodies in reaction to cultural and discursive phenomena (e.g., cycling competitions and politics), the same affective vectors that seek actualization in the exchanges. The singular forces that participate in producing this plural subjectivity therefore bridge the pre-discursive and discursive dimension in a sequence of acts of self-positioning that the linguistic enunciations of the dialogues actualize.

Moreover, the enunciation of the Rule, which addresses a *you* whose addressee is ambiguous, also points at how the first-person plural narrators of *54* and *L'armata* encourage the reader to imagine herself as a singular part of the collective subjectivity enacted in the text. The ambiguity of the *you* exploits the plurality of possible uses of this pronoun in oral Italian, where the speaker can utilize it to express general considerations, make examples or draw the listener's attention (Lorenzetti 97). In the dialogic settings of both novels, the addressee is unlikely to be a figure within the diegesis. A more persuasive interpretation would see the narrator addressing the

reader in order to open the dialogic exchanges to her figure as well. In Lazzarato's terminology, the Rule crystallizes in language a collective act of self-positioning in a dialogic dimension where the reader is invited to situate herself and respond. In 54, this strategy emerges most clearly in the episode "della schedina" (178); when the whole bar is absorbed in this shared ritual, the *you* interpellates the reader, drawing her into the narrative and making her part of the collective performance of filling out the bet coupon.

On the other hand, in *L'armata* using the pronoun *you* is so frequent that it becomes a constitutive element in the enactment of the conversation between the narrator, characters and reader. A *you* pronoun referring to the reader is literally the first word uttered by the narrator: "Te lo si conta noi, com'è che andò" (11). Later in the same chapter and in the rest of the novel, the reader is continuously (and explicitly) addressed. The reader participates in creating the narrator's account when asked to imagine a scene, respond to the narrator's words, and take a position as interpreter of events: "Figurala come riesci..." (20), "se ci pensi bene" (113), "Adesso figurale bene, fai conto di averle difronte" (129), "Fa' conto..." (396), "te dici...te dici così..." (397), "tu ti chiederai perché..." (545), "Noi abbiamo provato a costruire la torre, ricordi?" (557). Constantly present for the narrator, the reader represents a standpoint with which to interact; thus, the reading experience is at the core of the performative enactment of dialogue, and, consequently, of the plural subjectivity it engenders. This enactment becomes a further form of actualization in the reader's imagination, one that produces an encounter between her subjectivity and possible alternative relationalities articulated in the text.

Yet, the complex articulation of singular and plural discussed thus far embodies an alternative still grounded in an anthropocentric understanding of dialogic exchanges. First-person plural narrators' speech acts crystallize primarily human or human-related entanglements of

agencies manifested in verbal enunciation. The series of linguistic exchanges between narrator, characters, and reader center around the human capacity of uttering words and postulate this as the essential agential contribution to producing a plural subjectivity. However, this pluralism does not yet include nonhuman agencies as their contribution to the dialogic dimension (i.e., the *presence* to which the human speaker responds) is material, affective, and non-logocentric. Wu Ming's experiments with the narrative voices, in the words of Guattari, "deterritorialise a segment of the real [i.e., the Aurora bar, the faubourg St. Antoine] in such a way as to make it play the role of a partial enunciator" (131). Yet, the ontological complexity of this segment of the real (affective, material, and discursive forces that produce it) appears reduced to its human constituents and their abilities, such as speaking.

I must specify that I am not advocating that (non)human entities are voiceless or unable to speak—in fact, my mobile phone speaks better English than me. Rather, my point is that (non)human entities participating in the dialogic exchange connect to each other via forms of communication not necessarily actualized in language. The problem is therefore literature's ability to crystallize these into forms of expression. A possible technical solution to this problem may be to make nonhuman entities (e.g., objects, animals, natural elements) capable of human speech—a trope largely implemented across a wide array of literary genres ranging from fables to science fiction.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> In their theoretical reflections, Wu Ming seem to embrace this technical solution in relation to the voice of the Aurora bar, as in those chapters "è il bar stesso che parla, quel 'noi' è la sua voce collettiva, la media algebrica dei punti di vista di tutti quelli che lo frequentano" (Wu Ming 1, "NIE" 28). This statement is however ambiguous, to say the least. Wu Ming 1 does not articulate the meaning of the first sentence (what does it mean that *the bar speaks*? Where does its voice come from? From a human entity, a nonhuman one, their entanglement?) and then suddenly moves to a description of the point of view of the *we* narrator—which is more consistent with the argument made in that section of the essay about the use of the point of view in the New Italian Epic. Wu Ming 1's sentence, more suggestive than persuasive, has been so far accepted by Wu Ming scholars without a fully elaborated critical confrontation with and investigation into its ethical implications (Salsi 83; Clivio 31; Masterson, "The Wu Ming" 84). A footnote to Wu Ming 1's sentence adds that "si tratta di forzare e allargare la figura retorica detta 'fallacia

However, it is imperative to note that adopting this rhetorical device without problematizing it or using it to problematize human-nonhuman relations—meaning, accepting that nonhumans can be assigned human qualities without questioning of this process and interpretation from an ethical perspective—can be controversial; this only apparent technical solution may risk operating a drastic and anthropocentric reduction of both the complexity of dialogic exchanges and the radical alterity of nonhuman others (Bolongaro, “Calvino’s” 109–11). At this point, I am inclined to think we need to imagine and design alternative rhetorical devices capable of honoring the complexity of (non)human entanglements and the contribution of (non)human intra-actions (dialogic or not) to the production of subjectivity.

Wu Ming’s design of first-person plural narrators’ standpoints counterbalances the anthropocentric aspect of their experiments with narrative voices. Analyzing these enunciators’ positions towards the world, and their impact on the enunciation style in the case of *L’armata*, reveals their sensitivity for (a) nonhuman agents’ material *presences* in the dialogic dimension; (b) human characters’ responses to these presences, which cannot be reduced to formulating linguistic expressions; and (c) the participation of these presences and the related responses in intra-actions engendering collective subjectivities.

Given the narrators’ post-anthropocentric attitude, Lazzarato’s theory and especially his terminology become problematic to use in literary investigations. The analysis of narrative speech acts as forms that actualize the utterers’ ethico-political acts of self-positioning remains

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patetica’ che consiste nell’attribuire sentimenti o pensieri umani a cose, astri, eventi, fenomeni meteorologici, eccetera. Se usata con poco criterio, la fallacia patetica ha effetti nauseabondi. Se usata bene, fa volare” (Wu Ming 1, “NIE” 29). The footnote does not really clarify, at least in my opinion, the ambiguous sentence. What Wu Ming 1 means by “forzare” and “allargare,” for instance, is unclear. What is clear, perhaps, is that the entanglement of narrative voice and point of view in the Aurora bar chapters is an attempt to explore the threshold at which the human meets the nonhuman. This exploration, however, seems to entail the development of a critical approach to the projection of human traits on nonhuman entities and therefore the anthropomorphism that may characterize these nonhuman figures.

insufficient and ignores the complex set of intra-actions that, according to Barad's ontology, produce subjectivities through material-discursive phenomena. In sum, the performativity that enacts this production is not exclusively human nor necessarily bound to linguistic forms of crystallization. This performativity dwells in human *and* nonhuman matter and its capacity to respond and be responded to. A further point of entry into the literary text is therefore necessary and I propose to identify it with the study of narrative perspectives. A brief presentation of the implication of these considerations for our understanding of the collective voices in *54* and *L'armata* will serve as introduction to the next section of my analysis, where I will more thoroughly develop on these aspects.

The "la schedina" episode in *54* is the most interesting example of the post-anthropocentric attitude of the *we* narrator of the novel, a yet emerging attitude not as mature as that of *L'armata* narrative voice. As we have seen, the episode presents a ritual that does not condense the singularity of each contribution into one hegemonic outcome, "perché ognuno fa la sua schedina e ci scrive quello che vuole;" only the common coupon, "la schedina del bar," is to be filled after all contributors agree (179). However, it remains to be explored how these contributors are not only potential utterers or enunciators, but also with other material presences in the physical environment of the bar and, first and foremost, "la schedina." In other bars, the coupon is an insignificant "fogliettino" (178), an object passively filled by a single person. At the Aurora bar, instead, the coupon is "una cerimonia comune" (178), a ritual that entails specific material and discursive practices entangling (non)human agencies. The narrator's conception of the coupon as a ritual is in sharp contrast with its representation as a passive object and seems to suggest that this object is able to condition the behavior of human agents. The possible results of the football matches, and the corresponding options (1, 2 or X) among which each player is



asked to choose,<sup>31</sup> are nonhuman boundaries that delimit the manifestation of the players' free-will. The choice between these options triggers discussions between the regulars of the bar, especially Melega and Stefanelli, the two soccer experts. The experience of these two experts is fundamental for completing the ritual, which “per riuscire bene ha bisogno della fortuna di molti e dell’esperienza di qualcuno” (178). For the narrator, human experience is not sufficient for the success of the ritual, which also needs the luck of *many*. It is the portrayal of luck and the plurality included in this *many* that introduce a further element of the narrator’s post-anthropocentric attitude.

In the eyes of the narrator, luck is an undefinable feeling not exclusively human, but bound to and flowing through objects and matter—the tie you wear when your favourite soccer team plays, tarocchino cards, the pool table or, last but not least, the coupon. The *many* from which luck comes (i.e., the entities that propitiate the outcome of the bet) therefore include these objects. The presence of luck—this (non)human, material and affective bundle—is so important for the ritual of the coupon that the former has a say in the organization of the bar. It determines its weekly schedule (“la Sisal si compila il venerdì all’una puntuale”) and what the regulars are allowed to do at that particular moment (“nessuno deve fare un tarocchino, un tressette o una scopa, perché anche quelli sono giochi che conta la fortuna, e nel momento della schedina la buona stella del bar Aurora non deve distrarsi” (179)). The personification of luck in the last quotation (“la buona stella” is a metaphor for luck in Italian) does not reinstate its agency as human. Rather, it stresses the narrator’s sensibility for its necessary entangled presence in the ritual. Luck is a bundle of (non)human material and affective intensities that can be drawn

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<sup>31</sup> The “schedina” is a popular sport betting game introduced in Italy in 1946. The players must guess the results of thirteen (initially twelve) soccer matches and for each match they must indicate if the result will be a victory for the first or the second team (1 or 2) or a tie (X). Each player must fill at least a column of results, but the more columns one fills the higher the cost of the wager.

elsewhere (from the etymological sense of *dis-trarre*) or dispersed. Its presence therefore requires a material and discursive configuration, a post-anthropocentric ethical availability that in my opinion the regulars of the Aurora bar are asked to embody. Nevertheless, in the Aurora bar chapters the narrator's sensitivity for nonhuman agencies only prefigures, suggests and broaches an analysis of their contribution without really providing a full exploration. Indeed, the "schedina" episode contains elements and suggestions that Wu Ming will take up and develop in *L'armata*, from a particularly stylistic perspective.

While in 54 Wu Ming do not stylistically elaborate the entanglement between the collective narrative voice and the post-anthropocentric sensitivity embodied by its standpoint, in *L'armata* they design a specific style that reproduces the narrator's perception of reality. This style is used to convey the sans-culottes' perception of the continuity between human and nonhuman forms of material embodiments and articulate the post-anthropocentric orientation of their imagination. The distinctive features of this style are gallicisms, deformed latinisms, alliterative locutions, rhythmic sequences, onomatopoeic expressions, and Emilian dialectal forms—a linguistic *mélange* designed to display a strong oral imprint and affectively charge the narrator's voice.<sup>32</sup> This *mélange* is not a playful pastiche informed by a postmodernist taste for linguistic games, but a synergistic expression of affective forces entangled with perceptions of and connections to the materiality of the real. The language of the *vox plebis* conveys the dense

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<sup>32</sup> Here some examples: gallicisms ("stracciaculi," "negoddio," "garzotto," "orelli," "gianfotti," "micmac"), deformed latinisms ("*talisqualis*," "*hic-et-numquam*," "*inseculinculorum*," "*hicetnunc*," "etamoredèi"), alliterative locutions, rhythmic sequences ("enormissimo drago di fremenda bellezza," "via la giacca, la camicia, giù i culotti e le mutande," "Si piange tutti. Uomini, donne, bambini e bacucchi"), onomatopoeic expressions ("*Tump*," "*burubumburubum*"), and Emilian dialectal forms ("soquanti," "sbrisga," "giazzo," "saloppa," "arbalta," "sdozzo," "barsacco," "zagno," "buridone"). The expressions that I quote in this paragraph constantly return in all the chapters where the first-person plural narrator of *L'armata* speaks, therefore adding page numbers for all of them would hinder the flow of the reading. Here is the list of chapters from which I quote: Overture (ch. 4 and 8); Act One: Scene Two (ch. 3), Scene Six (ch. 1 and 5), Scene Nine (ch. 5); Act Two: Scene Six (ch. 1), Scene Eight (ch. 1 and 3), Scene Ten (ch. 3); Act Three: Scene Two (ch. 2), Scene Three (ch. 1), Scene Four (ch. 4), Scene Five (ch. 1); Act Four: Scene Two (ch. 1), Scene Three (ch. 1).

sense of connection between human bodies and matter—object, animals, the environment—through metaphors, similes, alliterations, metonymies and prosopopoeias (“Madama Ghigliottina,” “cittadina Fame”). The people waiting for the king’s execution at the beginning of the novel is “famelico e smerdo...assetato di sangue, enormissimo drago di fremenda bellezza” (12). The king’s head is a “zucca” (11), while necks “si slungano come polli o giraffe” to see it (13). Insults and descriptions of human and nonhuman entities, actions or natural phenomena metaphorically borrow qualities from the animal kingdom, the natural world, food, or objects.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, human bodies are represented in all their coarseness, as physical details are not idealized or politely skipped over. The insistence on certain phonetic combinations—for instance the double “zz” and “cc”—produce distinctively rough sounds that make this representation even more expressive: “uno degli scaldasedie si sgargarozza rosso fino ai capelli, sguaiano che manco si sono presi la briga di radersi, gli infamoni travestiti e sobillatori, con certe barbacce ruvide e sdozze. Soquanti si voltano verso le magliare, ché ce n’è diverse che sfoggiano bei mustacchi di natura e pure ciuffazzi villosi un bel po’ sotto le urecchie” (61). Human figures holding objects (e.g., the group of knitters with their needles in the passage cited) become ontologically ambiguous figures whose subjectivity is defined by the entanglement of human and nonhuman agencies: “stanno tutte ingruppate, che paiono una cosa sola, un mostro bertoccuto e chioccio, con certe grinfie dritte e puntute come ferri da maglia ... Mai fermi quegli spilloni,

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<sup>33</sup> See, for the animal kingdom, “figlio d’un cane,” “freddo cagnaccio,” “freddo porco,” “da far rinculare la testa nelle spalle, come si fosse tartarughi,” “una bella strigliata ai ronzini della Convenzione,” “le son saltate sopra come gatte artigiose,” “una filza di richieste lunga un cazzo di somaro,” “costretto dalla rognà a scrivere e mangiare a mollo come una rana,” “calci zoccoluti,” “tutta rannicchiata come fanno i millepiedi,” “in cerca di briciole, come formiche,” “le pesciaie si ingallettano e mettono mano ai merluzzi,” “Cosa sei, un merlo indiano?,” “che l’asino se lo fotta in Guyana”; for the natural world, “ma ce n’è voluto, del verde e del secco, cioè delle gran legnate,” “mentecattume, la schiuma lercia dell’onda”; for food “si snocciano gli anni ... come fossero olive,” “giù a sbucciare l’amazzone come un cipollo,” “s’era rotto le uova di quella manfrina,” “il popolo ... lo volevano sbriciolare come un filone di pane secco,” “siccome che a Parigi hanno fatto cavolfiore,” “salvare la buccia alla patria,” “certo come la mortazza”; and finally for objects “la lingua e la penna le usa come scimitarre, mica per pulire orelli a tariffa,” “il rasoio nazionale che spaventa i gianfotti come i fantocci per i passerì che beccano il grano.” These quotations are from the same chapters listed in note 1.

suegiù, suegiù, e quando ti fissano tutte quante in una volta ti viene da pensare che là sotto potrebbero esserci le tue budella, una bella sciarpa di trippa e il signore è servito” (59). These figures’ subjectivity does not stem from an abstract, rationalist and thus humanist conception of the individual; rather, it derives from a post-humanist apprehension of how complex collective entanglements of material and discursive forces determine subjectivity.

One of the most incisive examples of how the material constitution of human and nonhuman entities permeates the sans-culottes’ perception, affects and imagination is the figure of Scaramouche. During the Thermidorian reaction, the narrator and other voices put their hopes in the “Scaramouche l’ammazzaincredibili” (632) hero, a disguised Léo who beats the conservative forces representatives (the *Gioventù Dorata*) at night. The narrator elaborates on what people heard about the hero and imagines Scaramouche as a cyborg *ante litteram*, an assembly of human body parts, objects and spiritual forces. As the narrator explains: “l’arma di Scaramouche era lo spirito di Marat” (632). This spirit is actually an object—“una sbarra di ferro” according to some, “un femore d’uomo, un femore placcato d’argento” according to others. Moreover, he wears “una maschera di cuoio con un naso aguzzo e lunghissimo, un becco come un pugnale” with which he stabs the enemies in the eyes. During the attacks, Scaramouche waves “lo spirito di Marat slercio di sangue” that “ringhia vapore, sembra un animale, e ci ha una musta da matto, infino col buio si vedono gli occhi rossi nei buchi della maschera” (635). For the narrator, Scaramouche is “una macchina ammazzacattivi” (634), an assemblage of human and nonhuman components whose subjectivity and agency are defined from a post-anthropocentric perspective.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> It is interesting to note here that the representation of the figure of Scaramouche bridges two issues that my analysis is dealing with across Wu Ming’s literary paths: the formal articulation of (non)human entanglements and the need to develop pre-discursive and discursive forms of intervention. I focused on the first issue in the body of the text. Here, I want to remark that the weapon the hero carries—“lo spirito di Marat” (632)—is an ambiguous entity

The analysis of the perspective of the first-person plural narrators in *54* and *L'armata* demonstrates that Wu Ming experiment with the possibility of grafting post-anthropocentric standpoints onto dialogic assemblages of enunciation. These assemblages, however, are still fundamentally driven by human agents. Although some post-anthropocentric traits in these standpoints do emerge in the collective subjectivities portrayed in the two novels (and indeed seem to gain momentum in the later novel), Wu Ming are unprepared to reflect deeply upon human and nonhuman agencies' entanglements within these subjectivities. Instead, they focus on enunciation as an essentially human action that the production of subjectivity depends upon.

### 3.3. Don't Say a Word: Affective Exchanges between Humans, Animals and Technology

The study of first-person plural narrators in *54* and *L'armata* presented Wu Ming's reflection upon the relevance of the act of enunciation and the construction of a plural dialogic assemblage for subjectivity production. Wu Ming's construction of these narrative voices frames the exploration of singular-plural sustainable relations within a dialogic dimension. Moreover, in line with Lazzarato's theory, it posits the dialogic exchange between human figures central to the

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whose nature lies in-between the material dimension—it is made of iron or (plated) human bones—and the affective one—it embodies the spirit of one of the leaders of the Revolution that was closer to the sans-culottes. Note also that the representation of this weapon as the “spirit of Marat” comes from the point of view of the sans-culottes themselves, which therefore ground the actions of Scaramouche in an affective dimension, a political passion that the people shares. This passion situates the people in the coeval system of power relations—with Marat and against the conservatives—yet also speaks for the ethico-political stance of this people, the pre-discursive forces that inform their codified imagination and forms of expression. Scaramouche's material and linguistic practices then actualize this affective intensity. The hero physically attacks the conservative members of *Gioventù Dorata*, the so-called *muschiatini*, but he also challenges them elaborating alternative forms of expression. As they do not pronounce the consonant “r”—for instance “pa’ola mia, è inc’edibile. Gua’date quel ga’zone, quello alto una spanna più di ’stocazzo! Mise’abile individuo, nevre’o?” (459), the narrator imagines Scaramouche while he addresses them marking each R he pronounces, reinstating the importance of the R of the Revolution: “Voilà, Razza di Ripugnante iRRedimibile stRonzo! Non dovRai più compieRe alcuno sfoRzo, oRa, peR evitaRe di diRe la eRRe. AppRezzi o non appRezzi il soccoRso dello spiRito di MaRat?” (635)—and note that in Italian popular culture, the elision of the “r” in pronunciation is associated with the effete, upper class. The actions of Scaramouche, as imagined by the narrator, entangle the pre-discursive dimension of affect and the discursive dimension of material and linguistic practices in order to challenge the coeval system of power relations.

process of subjectivation. However, Wu Ming's articulation of these narrators' narrative perspectives (their standpoint, the way they relate to and position themselves toward the world) points to a whole different set of pre-discursive exchanges between and responses to (non)human entities. This set of responses that human *and* nonhuman participants enact as a series of acts of self-positioning during the exchange, is affective, grounded in material embodiments and entangled with ongoing multisensorial perceptions yet to be codified in linguistic utterances. How can literature, linguistic medium par excellence, possibly account for this set of pre-discursive exchanges? How can it open the horizon of these exchanges and fully explore the contribution of nonhuman singularities by acknowledging their agency in the production of subjectivity? What devices do Wu Ming elaborate in order to actualize that possibility?

I began to answer these questions in the last part of the previous section, where I detected the emergence of post-anthropocentric standpoints within the dialogic assemblages of *54* and *L'armata*. Wu Ming's experiments with post-anthropocentric standpoints, however, extend beyond the dialogic dimension of these novels and develop along a trajectory we are now well-equipped to pursue. In *54*, for instance, Wu Ming explores two different existential territories. The first investigates the encounter between the human and the nonhuman animal making the narrator adopt the point of view of a pigeon (3.1); the second reflects upon the entanglement between human beings and technology by having the narrator assume the standpoint of a TV set (3.2). The "point of view" category has a long and complicated history in literary criticism<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For a reconstruction of the literary debate around the category of point of view, see Van Peer and Chatman's *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective* (2001); Pugliatti's *Lo sguardo nel racconto: teorie e prassi del punto di vista* (1985); and Turchetta's *Il punto di vista* (1999). This debate is not relevant to my discourse because my aim is not to intervene in the field of narratology. In this field, the debate has particularly focused on classification schemes that allow critics to catalogue and describe the position of the narrator in relation to characters. These schemes of classification date back to the work of Henry James and Percy Lubbock, who distinguished between eight categories of point of view. Lubbock's classification, however, was based on a definition of point of view that does not separate the figure of the narrator from the standpoint that influences the narration. In *Figures III* and *Nouveau*

which, however, is of little relevance in this context insofar as I adopt a conception of point of view as multisensorial positionality in constant movement, evolution and transformation through contact with others. The point of view is for me a shifting and porous boundary, a liminal space that emerges from the interplay of multiple material-discursive agencies: the reader, her body and cultural background; literary conventions; the text and its material support; the author and the power relations in which she writes; the narrator and its position in the story world. The interplay of these agencies produce the point of view as a necessarily plural assemblage that opens a set of possible trajectories across unexplored existential territories. My conception of the point of view as a dynamic perspective or process is a hypothesis I am to test as a possible avenue for registering multiple and ongoing responses of (non)human entities to the world as well as their acts of self-positioning in the production of subjectivity.

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*discours du récit*, Gerard Genette formulated a definition of point of view that operates this distinction and also makes a terminological shift adopting the notion of focalization. Genette main argument is that voice (i.e., the narrator) has to be seen as a narrative element different from the factors that determine what the narrator knows. The set of these factors is what he calls focalization (*Nouveau* 49). Genette's distinction has been largely influential and has inspired seminal re-elaborations (see, for instance, Bal) as well as critiques (Fludernik). From the perspective of my existential approach, these definitions of point of view are problematic because they are limited to the narrative text. It is therefore difficult to implement them in a study of the point of view as a focal point of existential exploration, as Guattari would put it, as an attitude toward the world that the reader discovers and creates together with the text, its author and narrator. Yuri Lotman's proposal for defining focalization in relational terms, as the relationship between a subject and the represented story world is much more interesting. Yet, Lotman's structuralist approach—the point of view ultimately corresponds to the relationship between the structure of the story world and its elements—flaws its relational potential. Seeing this potential in a rhetorical vein, Wayne Booth's definition of implied author seems to see in the point of view a rhetorical strategy for convincing the reader of a particular view. Susan Sniader Lanser's theory of the narrative act draws on this rhetorical approach and interestingly read the notion of point of view via speech act theory. For Lanser, the point of view is a product of a series of speech acts carried out by the narrator, speech acts that derive their force from a set of ideological and cultural conventions (100). These conventions are not only internal to the story world, but also belong with the world of the author, a figure Lanser sees as extremely close to the narrative voice. Postulating this closeness is for her necessary in order to define the point of view as an instrument that “shapes, even controls, textual meaning and reader response” (18). While Lanser's proposal is the most relevant from my perspective—the point of view is the result of a process and not a fixed element—her definition has the same shortcomings of Booth's: the point of view is seen as an instrument aimed to control the reading experience. This imposing approach does not correspond to my take on the notion of point of view. I rather see this fluctuant and problematic category as a shifting boundary, a becoming, plural, material-discursive assemblage that stems from the performative entanglement of the text and the reader.

### 3.3.1 (Non)Human Synesthetic Intra-Actions

This sub-section will focus on the 54 sequences narrating the relationship between professor Renato Fanti, who gives private English lessons to Pierre, and pigeons, which Fanti breeds on his rooftop. A *colombofilo*, Fanti has been breeding pigeons since he was a teenager. The pigeon house on the rooftop is the setting where Pierre and the professor have their lessons, usually accompanied by music—Fanti is also a passionate Jazz lover. When Fanti takes care of his birds on the rooftop, his relationship with them makes him fall “in una sorta di trance” (214) narratively articulated in short sequences of free indirect speech or interior monologue. The first of these sequences, where the professor frees the birds to train them, is introduced by a metaphor comparing him to a conductor: “liberò lo stormo e cominciò ad agitare la banderuola per dirigerli nell’alzata, con movimenti da direttore d’orchestra su andante maestoso” (213). The precise comparison between his movements and those of a conductor (“andante maestoso”), combined with a previous sentence of free indirect speech (“L’inverno era finito, per far bere i piccioni non era più necessario rompere lo strato di ghiaccio”), suggest that one sees the scene from Fanti’s point of view. The metaphor condenses a singular form of synesthetic imagination that makes Fanti seem as if he were observing his movements while simultaneously listening to their musical rhythm.

Fanti indulges in this synesthetic approach even more literally later in the novel, when, during a private lesson with Pierre, he substitutes a disc on his turntable. The professor disregards Pierre’s questions and “guardò la musica” (383), once again enacting a mix of visual and aural stimuli whose complexity increases in the ensuing description of what the professor is listening to. Riffs run and stop as if diving into the sea—“fu come vederli tuffarsi in mare da una



scogliera”—trumpet sounds are flames that light fuses and cause explosions that make a sax take off. The orchestra becomes a huge club that hits a beast until the *finale*, when the rolling of drums constitutes “l’ultimo spasmo del corpo prima del colpo di grazia. Fine” (384). Fanti does not simply translate the music in visual impressions but perceives it as a composition of stimuli from a complex set of sensorial experiences.

The paragraph that follows the conductor metaphor deepens the intrusion into Fanti’s mind, reporting his interior monologue in the present tense:

Che spettacolo! Nelle virate ciascun piccione esibisce dapprima il dorso poi il ventre, che hanno colori completamente diversi. Si moltiplichi l’effetto per decine e decine di esemplari, e s’otterrà una lieve onda cangiante, su cui la luce si frange e le schegge rimbalzano in mille direzioni. Nello stormo c’erano piumaggi schietti e gazzi, neri, rossi, ‘pietra scura,’ ‘pietra marmo,’ ‘sgurafossi,’ ‘brodoceci’... (214)

Fanti’s impressions of the pigeons focus on the visual aspect of the scene, initially represented as a hyperbolic composition of light effects. But toward the end, these perceptions seem to assume more material and multi-sensorial connotations evident in terms like “schegge,” also associated with the sense of touch, and the attention for the plumage.

The scene that first introduces Fanti’s colomboophilia is a prelude with multiple resonances to the passage in which the homing pigeon Gulliver travels from Dubrovnik, where Pierre’s father is hiding, to Italy. Fanti’s discourse about the pigeons is echoed in Gulliver’s synesthetic perception of reality. At the start of the passage, the sun is personified, as if it were a familiar figure that the pigeon uses to orient itself: “Il sole sbadigliava a Oriente. Girò la testa e lasciò che la luce gli scivolasse addosso” (484). The light has material consistency and caresses the pigeon’s body, while the wind—usually perceived through tactile or aural stimuli—becomes

a visible, rough entity dirty with sand: “Un vento sporco di sabbia aveva spazzato le nuvole. Sapeva di erba bruciata e argilla” (484). The verb “sapere” assumes an ambiguous meaning here. It may mean that the wind tastes or smells like burnt grass and clay. The mix of these two would produce a synesthetic mingling that further increases because, from the reader’s human perspective, burnt grass associates with olfactory stimuli and clay more with the sense of touch. The free indirect speech delivering Gulliver’s impressions focuses on the olfactory and visual stimuli that help the pigeon orient itself: “Mille altri odori riempivano le narici ma alcuni, di polline e frutta, non erano nuovi. Gli stessi che, a casa, soffiavano dal sole nel primo mattino ... Annusò l’aria ancora una volta e sentì di potercela fare” (484).

When Gulliver finally arrives at his destination, at the end of the chapter, it recognizes buildings and locations:

Ma ormai cominciava a riconoscere i luoghi, non poteva mollare...Ricordava bene la traccia del fiume, la geometria dei cipressi, l’edificio diroccato in cima alla collina...

Vide la torre bianca in mezzo al grigio acceso del prato.

Vide i ponti allungati sul fiume.

Vide i tetti e i comignoli delle case. Conosceva ogni tegola, in quel punto. (487)

The pigeon’s experience of orienting itself is a multi-sensorial process with different stimuli. The long sequence of free indirect speech where the narrator assumes Gulliver’s perspective conveys this process through metaphors, metonymies—the sun for the East—and synaesthesia. Wu Ming’s experiment with the animal’s point of view is a creative exploration of a nonhuman existential territory that the text offers to the reader’s imagination and understanding of possible forms of relating to the world.

However, the echo between Fanti and the pigeon's synesthetic perception of reality sounds suspicious, or at least may lead us to detect in it an uncomfortable trace of anthropocentrism. In the passage succeeding the professor's description of the pigeons, he wonders how homing pigeons can find their way home ("I piccioni, come fanno a tornare a casa?" (215)). Although he does not find a definitive answer, his hypothesis matches Gulliver's multi-sensorial sensibility for familiar locations and geomagnetic fields: "Probabilmente era una combinazione di magnetismo, posizione del sole e paesaggi familiari. Pretty impressive for such a small bird, don't you think?" (215). The novel seems to project on the animal the modalities of its encounter with the world as the human imagines them and, in doing so, apparently reinstates an anthropocentric form of relationality. While the depth of this echo remains suspicious, I want to counter this point by focusing on what stylistically joins Fanti and the pigeon's being in the world: synaesthesia. The comparison between Fanti's thoughts and the description of Gulliver's journey stressed their consonance, but it is at the level of the style of the two passages that this consonance becomes much more articulated and entangled with elements of dissonance.

Wu Ming's experimental construction of Gulliver and Fanti's points of view explores the possibility for human and nonhuman perspectives to intra-act and affect each other. Their intra-actions are centred on the concept of synaesthesia: Fanti, like Gulliver, perceives the world synesthetically. One may think that Fanti is responsible for that, as if he somehow transferred his idiosyncratic sensorial approach to the animal, but Gulliver is not part of Fanti's breeding. On the contrary, the long-standing cohabitation between the professor and his pigeons, and their acts of self-positioning toward the world as representatives of a nonhuman species and not as pets, affected the synesthetic standpoint of their caretaker. Fanti's closeness to the pigeons evolves as a series of intra-actions where the two subjective points of view are not separate entities that

interact but are ontologically entangled. Their entanglement performatively produces and reconfigures Fanti and the pigeons' subjectivity hybridizing their ontological dimensions and endowing both with a synesthetic approach to the world. This hybridization, however, does not eliminate the irreducible alterity of the animal to the human and vice versa. Yes, both Fanti and the pigeon perceive the world synesthetically, but the modalities by which this synaesthesia unfolds are different. On the one hand, Fanti sees the music. His synesthetic approach is mostly focused on the entanglement of visual and aural stimuli. On the other hand, Gulliver's multi-sensorial experience is much more complex and, if anything, centred on the mix of visual and olfactory stimuli. The overlapping between Fanti and Gulliver's synesthetic approach is therefore only partial. This partiality acknowledges the (non)human entanglement without making the nonhuman totally identify with the human perception of the world and vice versa.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, if we go back to Fanti's hypothesis in view of what I have argued in this paragraph, we may also finally notice that the hypothesis does not consider the pigeons' capacity to use olfactory stimuli to orient themselves. This is a further element of dissonance that protects the irreducibility of the animal's being from the risk of anthropocentrism. Human and nonhuman subjectivities, as the actions they perform, their agencies, are here ontologically entangled and hybridized, but their differences are maintained.

The example of Fanti and the pigeons is an interesting articulation of (non)human entanglements that do not manifest themselves as a dialogue (i.e., the pigeons do not speak to Fanti), but rather are pre-discursive, affective and grounded in their material embodiments. Fanti's human subjectivity is therefore pictured as a relational entity that seems to embody an alternative to rationalist, hyper-individualist and humanist models. Nevertheless—I am about to

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<sup>36</sup> The identification of Gulliver's perception and Fanti's is also discouraged by the distance of the two episodes in the novel (more than two hundred pages).

take a political leap that bridges this and the next subsection—the example of Fanti and the pigeons does not investigate the connection between this pre-discursive entanglement and their position in a particular power relations system. Thus, Wu Ming’s exploration of the entanglement between Fanti and the pigeons does not seem to consider their relationship ethics from a political perspective nor fully acknowledge that their (non)human entanglement is located within a specific set of power relations affecting the production of their subjectivities. The professor is fond of his birds, but his love for them does not eliminate the fact that they are *commodities* that he *purchases*. Fanti’s character description as willing to spend significant amounts of money to *collect* these birds subtly seems to convey his *fetishism* for the animals (214).<sup>37</sup> Moreover, Gulliver may even be a nonhuman figure that the text endows with agency, but the text does not problematize the fact that this agency is instrumental to human needs. Ultimately, Gulliver is a homing pigeon whose journeys are defined according to these needs. It seems to me that, in this particular example, Wu Ming’s exploration of (non)human entanglements does not fully consider and problematize their ethico-political implications insofar as the example does not linger on the forms of commodification and exploitation that frame it. The example is therefore useful for understanding the role (non)human entanglements play in the production of subjectivity, but does not discuss its localization within a specific (i.e., neoliberal) system of power relations. This means we should perhaps look somewhere else to find this problematization.

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<sup>37</sup> The example that accounts for Fanti’s fetishism is also problematic because it refers to the purchase of a female pigeon to which the professor seems to be ambiguously attracted: “All’ultima mostra-mercato svoltasi a Bologna, aveva commesso una vera e propria pazzia, spendendo trecentomila lire per comprare una femmina esile, dal dorso grigio chiaro tendente all’indaco, una specie di color ‘sgurafosso.’ Elegante. Si chiamava Eloisa, e aveva percorso la tratta Indocina-Italia in due mesi. Duecento chilometri al giorno, *a remarkable accomplishment*. Questo era successo il 6 febbraio—cioè l’acquisto, non la trasvolata, quella era stata qualche mese prima. Fanti era in corrispondenza via *homing pigeon* con diversi amici in Inghilterra, Francia e Irlanda, però Eloisa non l’aveva ancora messa alla prova” (214).

### 3.3.2 “Hey, Commodity, How Does That Feel?”

Wu Ming’s experiments with ontological hybridization of human and nonhuman perspectives in the domain of technology differ from the pigeon’s example. Their experiments in this domain directly address ethico-political issues related to the role nonhuman agencies play in the production of subjectivity as well as their co-optation by neoliberal apparatuses. In order to understand these experiments, we must reflect with Lazzarato upon the connection between the process of subjectivation and the production of commodities for the neoliberal market. For the Italian philosopher, the machinic dynamic of the production of subjectivity resembles that of industrial production (*Signs* 48). He argues that

...in modern-day capitalism subjectivity is the product of a world-wide mass industry. For Guattari, it is even the primary and most important of capitalist effects since subjectivity conditions and participates in the production of all other commodities. Subjectivity is a ‘key commodity’ whose ‘nature’ is conceived, developed, and manufactured in the same way as an automobile, electricity, or a washing machine” (Lazzarato, *Signs* 55).

Neoliberal apparatuses of production in, for instance, entertainment, communication and marketing industries, produce the conditions for the subject to emerge—and with it her desires, affects and needs—because these are a profitable investment. The desires, affects and needs that drive the emergence of the subject generate profit insofar as the subject *pays for* experiences, goods and products that fulfil these needs and desires. We see therefore how subjectivity becomes a product that one can obtain in exchange for something else (money, personal data or information) across machinic networks. As such, subjectivity is a commodity that the

apparatuses of social subjection and machinic enslavement produce. Understanding the agential role of nonhuman agencies in the production of subjectivity, and being ultimately able to envision alternative (non)human relationalities, requires understanding how commodification works and how this process impacts the existence of (non)human entities.

Neoliberal capitalism commodifies (non)human entities reducing their value to the exchange-value they have on the market. This reduction is dramatically deterministic and involves human as much as nonhuman entities. Anything from cultural products, human bodies, experiences and objects to DNA genes, data and atoms can be bought and sold on the market as a commodity and exploited for profit. The process of commodification therefore produces relations, or rather the possibility for exchange relations to be established and indeed for the market to exist. The market essentially consists of these networks of relations, networks that are machinic as they are brought about by human as much as nonhuman agencies. Making profit does not simply entail exploiting what human agents can do (i.e., their labour force), but involves the enslavement of machinic networks that allow commodities and capital to be mobilized, exchanged, invested and accumulated in a matter of seconds (or even less, if we consider the use of automatic algorithms by investment companies). Commodification is the mechanism that ultimately allows the market to establish, exploit and enslave these assemblages and pursue its ambitious aim of reducing all the possible forms of (non)human relationality to exchanges ruled by the logic of the market.

However, as I argue in the introduction to this study, the market is not a transcendental entity imposing its logic on passive slaves. It is an enactment, a performative entity that machinic assemblages constantly bring about. This is why looking at the world from the point of view of a commodity may be a way to make sense of our position in these assemblages and what

commodification is and does to, for instance, the materiality of objects or our bodies. Wu Ming's creative elaboration of the point of view of a television set called McGuffin Electric Deluxe in 54 aims to produce an imaginary understanding of how human and technological agencies intra-act in the networks of machinic enslavement and how these intra-actions impact our current apprehension of the material world.

The story of the TV set follows its different owners/uses around the world. It is initially used in USA before WWII, then stolen from an American military base in Naples and finally deprived of its inner mechanism to accommodate smuggled cocaine. When the smugglers suddenly lose the object, it is repeatedly bought and sold in several parts of Italy because it does not work. The point of view of McGuffin, whose name is usually introduced without article, as a person's proper name, holds a hybrid point of view of human and technological traits. This hybridization marks a different strategy in Wu Ming's implementation of nonhuman perspectives, as we are not dealing with a human and a nonhuman entity whose points of view intra-act (e.g., Fanti and the pigeon), but with an object whose standpoint merges two different ways of being in the world. McGuffin, in other words, *embodies* the intra-action. This embodiment is Wu Ming's way to entangle human and nonhuman existences as part of networks of machinic enslavement.

McGuffin, first of all, is an object; but it is endowed with human senses and faculties (sight, hearing, speaking, haptic perceptions) that can also be easily associated, with a bit of imagination, with the technical affordances of a TV set. The embodiment of the human–nonhuman entanglement is therefore primarily inscribed in its materiality:

Qualcosa era cambiato, dentro. Era stravolto, gonfio, privo di prospettiva. Cieco. E anche muto. Sordo no, ci sentiva ancora bene. Forse l'umidità accumulata in quella



stamberga polverosa, o la polvere stessa, oppure ancora le mani di ferro di quel tizio che gli avevano dato una bella scrollata. Forse gli effetti di uno stato depressivo causato dalla scarsa considerazione che lo circondava. (263)

McGuffin's senses, moreover, are coupled with an inner life that extends the entanglement to the psychological domain. The TV set has an all-too-human mind punctuated with doubts, questions and hyper-individualized complaints about the conditions of emergence of its subjectivity: "Che razza di situazione! L'inattività era davvero snervante. Dubbi e ipocondrie assalivano la fiducia in se stessi. Sarò ancora capace di fare bene il mio lavoro? Riusciranno a farmi funzionare anche qui, così lontano da casa? Tornerò a far ridere la gente, a interessarla con le notizie, a commuoverla?" (42). McGuffin *thinks*. He is affected by depressive disorders and loss of self-esteem, pathologies that typically characterize neoliberal society (Berardi 120, 131). The human–nonhuman entanglement McGuffin embodies is therefore material and affective, as in the example of Fanti and the pigeons, but also contextualized in the incipient society of spectacle (Debord) and, ultimately, neoliberal society.

As McGuffin is constantly bought and sold, its role in this society is clear: it is a commodity and, as such, part of neoliberal apparatuses of commodification of matter. Its commodification does not merely determine its role into the story of 54, but actually informs its mind and the way McGuffin conceives of its material constitution and subjectivity. The TV set does not show off its technological qualities, such as its "schermo a luminosità fisiologica" (43), to value its sheer materiality, but to present itself as a more valuable product for human consumption or furnishing a typical bourgeois house: "Un McGuffin Electric Deluxe non è un semplice accessorio, ma parte integrante dell'arredamento di una casa moderna...è disponibile in diversi colori per meglio adattarsi al tono della vostra mobilia" (342). McGuffin's portrays itself

as a material entity whose constitution is functional to and determined by the regime of market commodification, given its existence is instrumental to the well-being and entertainment of human consumers (“E cosa c’è di meglio per svagarsi di un bel televisore McGuffin Electric Deluxe, che col suo schermo a luminosità fisiologica non stanca nemmeno la vista?” (449)).

Yet, McGuffin’s perspective is also marked by melodramatic individualism. Its reactions to events are often hyperbolic, as if the object was destined to damnation: “Destino crudele! ... Sorte infame! ... Esito beffardo! (448–50); meanwhile, the description of its “glorie passate” (i.e., sensational news reports about the American successes in the Cold War) are self-celebratory and exaggerated (42). McGuffin’s self-portrayal betrays an ideologically connoted egotism, the presumption to be *the* protagonist, *the* focus of the attention, *the* hyper-individualist subject of neoliberal society.

McGuffin’s point of view hybridizes human and nonhuman traits in order to underline how, in that society, both human and nonhuman configurations of matter are commodified, subjected, exploited and enslaved. Wu Ming’s ironic and hyperbolic style characterizes and criticizes the delusive nature of McGuffin’s conception of the individual and its deterministic approach to its material components. Even the behaviour of its human owners, who are ready to sell it as soon as they realize that it does not work, confirms that McGuffin’s (and therefore the neoliberal) conception of the individual embodies a paradoxical contradiction. Neoliberal apparatuses deceive human subjects by spreading hyper-individualized, autonomous and independent models of subjectivity (i.e., human capital, self-entrepreneurship), while these subjects and their embodiments are actually enslaved as commodities and considered parts of society as long as they are functional to it.

However, the evolution of McGuffin's story and standpoint opens a possibility for the enactment of alternative conceptions of matter and subjectivity. During one of the last transfers, its owner drops it and the TV set falls apart. As the reader finds out in the final part of the novel, the remains are thrown away and taken to a landfill. The last sequence of free indirect speech dedicated to McGuffin's point of view reveals the evolution of its perspective. McGuffin realizes that the entertaining stories that he projected in the past, such as the Tom and Jerry cartoons, are fake interpretations of a different materiality that does not resemble it: "Topi e gatti si aggiravano intorno a McGuffin, in cima alla collina di rifiuti. Sovente, una gatta s'appisolava dentro McGuffin. Non somigliava a 'Tom.' I topi avevano peli e code lunghe, e non somigliavano a 'Jerry'" (626). The landscape of the landfill is distressing and encompasses broken chairs, animal calls, worn down clothes and a terrible smell. McGuffin seems sad, because it "non avrebbe più captato onde elettromagnetiche per trasformarle in sogni o incubi" (627).

Yet, an alternative relationship to the materiality that surrounds it and its own material dimension makes it feel valued: "Tuttavia, McGuffin serviva a qualcosa. La gatta era incinta. Avrebbe partorito prima di Natale. Era passato di casa in casa. Adesso era una casa. Qualcuno aveva davvero bisogno di lui, alla buon'ora. Avesse avuto una bocca, un volto, McGuffin avrebbe sorriso" (627). The cat does not commodify the material structure of the object according to market discursive practices, but transforms McGuffin into a dwelling, sheer material protection for its life and that of the feline's puppies. McGuffin and the cat are two entities that neoliberal society has marginalized. They are different, but they now share a space of empathy where commonality stems from the hybridization of their existential and ontological condition. McGuffin reconfigures its perception of its own material dimension intra-acting with

the needs of the cat, assuming a different standpoint toward the world and therefore elaborating new possibilities for the emergence of its subjectivity in the future.

Wu Ming's experiment with the perspective of the TV set marks a new direction in their use of (non)human standpoints. Through McGuffin's hybrid point of view, Wu Ming imagine entering a network of machinic enslavement—the process of production, commodification and consumption of matter—that reminds us of how neoliberal apparatuses control human and nonhuman material configurations. McGuffin's point of view embodies and crystallizes this process. This crystallization, still focused on the effects of enslavement on one component of the process (e.g., the TV set), offers the reader an imaginary and cognitive experience that may help her figure out the pervasiveness of this process in the material world. The next step in Wu Ming's experiments with literary forms of expression will be finding the most effective narrative *entity* able to account for the whole ramified network of enslavement and not only the effects on one of its slaves.

Before following the next steps in Wu Ming's experiments, I want to briefly return to the hypothesis I made at the beginning of this section and wonder whether the narrative point of view is a rhetorical device that allows us to account for the encounter between (non)human entities and the world and understand their role in the production of subjectivity. Focusing on how Wu Ming's elaboration of post-anthropocentric perspectives impacts the reader's experience may help answer these questions. The existential conception of the narrative point of view that I proposed—a moving position and threshold at which one encounters others—is grounded in the idea that the formal elaboration of post-anthropocentric standpoints produces an imaginary experience where narrator, reader and text co-enact. The narrator assumes a post-anthropocentric standpoint by imagining and encouraging the reader to imagine the encounter between an animal

or an object and the world and this entails performing imaginatively that encounter in the forms of expression of the text. The literary speech act, therefore, offers to the reader a creative experience of imagination that does not transform her body into that of an animal (for instance, a pigeon), but rather opens a space of possible encounters, imaginary relationalities and alternative positionalities to which the reader would not otherwise be able to access.

The opening of this horizon involves ethical and political stakes. The ethical dimension consists in the reader becoming able to imagine how the production of subjectivity is not controlled by a humanist, autonomous, free-willing subject, but is a phenomenon enacted by the intra-actions of (non)human agencies. This imaginative exploration may inspire a political praxis, but the reader's experience of this opening is primarily cognitive, as it impacts her apprehension of reality and the relations that constitute it. Imagining (non)human others' encounters with the world, the reader and the author, who experiment with linguistic forms of expression, explore different existential territories that contribute to their understanding of the complex networks of relations that constitute the world ontologically. The literary encounters between the reader and (non)human points of view therefore produce knowledge: knowledge of the possibilities for the human and nonhuman subject to affect each other's subjectivity; knowledge of the possible forms of actualization of this process in linguistic expressions; and knowledge that may be implemented in the design of a post-humanist and post-anthropocentric political praxis.

### 3.4. What the Hell is That? Machinic Enslavement as a Narrative Entity

Thus far I have focused on fictional texts (i.e., novels) allowing Wu Ming to reflect on the complex ways in which contemporary subjectivities are produced and develop the expressive

means to address such complex processes. The ethical and political stakes involved in this exploration have gradually begun to surface and come to the forefront of Wu Ming's engagement with literature in a work which straddles the categories of reportage, docufiction and fiction proper. *Un viaggio che non promettiamo breve* (2016) deals with the environmental movement that has grown in opposition to the construction of the Italian high-speed railway (TAV) between Florence and Milan and in the Susa valley. Environmental exploitation, of which the TAV is an obvious example, is a complex systemic process that is not engendered by and does not affect only human beings. It damages life and matter in all its manifestations. It is in order to confront this process in its full complexity that Wu Ming 1 is driven to push further the analysis of the entanglement of human and nonhuman agencies and produce a narrative that strives to make the reader understand such entanglement. But in order to understand what Wu Ming 1 is attempting and evaluate his achievement it is necessary to rely on an eco-centric standpoint, such as Barad's ontology. This can guide and help us imagine appropriate strategies of intervention as well as possible alternative practices. As we will see in the next section, the envisaged alternative practices (e.g., walking, hiking) ultimately escape the boundary of the literary text and seek actualization in renewed, more creative and explorative ways of *tenere il culo in strada*. This brings the trajectory of Wu Ming's activism back where it started but with a massively increased understanding of the contemporary predicament and of how to intervene effectively in it.

The boldest and most innovative move by Wu Ming 1, as he sets out to account for the complex set of material and discursive agencies at work in the TAV project in the Susa valley, is to draw on Howard Phillips Lovecraft's horror stories and invent a lugubrious creature: "l'Entità" (*Un viaggio* 61). This Entity incorporates institutional powers, discourses, communication networks, human bodies, opinions, private interests, instruments and ideas that

defend the construction of the railway. The manifestations of this Entity in the text are diverse, multiple, ramified, at times identifiable with a character, at others more similar to a standpoint or a presence that hunts the environment. This diversity is the result of Wu Ming 1's struggle to find the most effective forms to give literary expression to this complex phenomenon. The narrative of this struggle is part of the book and is presented as a constant, ongoing creative process that informs the representation of the Entity and also includes reading as a constitutive component of a complete literary experience.

In the first part of *Un viaggio*, the voice of the narrator, which coincides with the author's throughout the book, is concerned with its complex nature and wonders how to describe the Entity: "Descriverla? E come, se era invisibile? Soltanto alla luce del giorno, mettendo bene a fuoco, si sarebbe potuto intuire un nucleo in movimento, vibratile, una sorta di fitto vortice, mulinello di incomunicabilità e grumi di miti logori" (62). A combination of a "mulinello di incomunicabilità" and "grumi di miti logori," the Entity spans the pre-discursive and the discursive domains, or rather points to the necessity for us to understand them as co-implicated and entangled. Barad's ontology here helps us make sense of the nature of the Entity. It is not a mere material substance, as Wu Ming 1 initially pictures it,<sup>38</sup> but a material-discursive phenomenon whose material and discursive dimensions are "mutually implicated" (152).

The forms of expression that Wu Ming 1 implements in the book aim at crystallizing the complexity of this phenomenon. The author makes the Entity an organism with its own point of view and identified by a distinct literary style. Based on original variations of the techniques of free indirect speech and interior monologue, this style is characterized by formally elaborated

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<sup>38</sup> I report the first description of the entity in footnote 39.

periods that often elide the verb or proceed by *accumulatio*.<sup>39</sup> Also, the language that portrays the Entity is superior in register compared to the oral and investigative style that features in the sequences dedicated to the history of the No TAV movement. The former is characterized by the use of figures of speech like similes (“la carta ribolliva...borbottando come il fango di un laghetto termale” (61)), metaphors (“facendo nascere e imbizzarrire uragani di pulviscolo e parole, tornado di slogan” (104)), *figura etymologica* (“sogno sognato” (345)), alliterations (“sentiva sulla pelle il soffio spezzato del suo sonno disturbato” (374)), oxymoron (“L’Entità si era destata con un urlo muto” (374)) and onomatopoeias (“plop, plop” (61)). The style of the sequences dedicated to the Entity makes the reader *feel* its presence throughout the language of the text, as if able to possess and haunt it. The complexity of this denser and more elaborated style stands for the complexity of the material-discursive phenomenon the author is dealing with and the reader is called to understand.

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<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, the sequence that introduces the first appearance of the entity: “Notte di tardo autunno. Su Venaus, cielo stellato. Cinquanta chilometri verso est-sudest, in linea d’aria, sorvolando San Giorio e Villarfocchiardo, Sant’Antonino e Chiusa di San Michele, Sant’Ambrogio e Avigliana coi due laghi sulla destra, e poi Rivoli, Grugliasco, e infine Torino: Borgata Lesna → Santa Rita → San Salvator. In piazza Nizza 46, un palazzo grigio e liscio di sette piani. Al quinto piano, un ufficio, a quell’ora deserto. Nella stanza più grande dell’ufficio, un tavolo da disegno poco inclinato, quasi orizzontale. Sul tavolo, nella luce di una lampada a braccio flessibile, un foglio bianco. Come una Sindone, il foglio riportava l’impronta della Val di Susa in variabili toni di grigio: l’orografia, le linee della ferro via, delle strade, dei corsi d’acqua ... Su quei toni di grigio, righe più marcate, righe nere, continue e tratteggiate, accompagnate da scritte e cifre. Il progetto della Nuova Linea Torino–Lione. Sotto il disegno, la carta ribolliva, plop, plop, borbottando come il fango di un laghetto termale. Il progetto era insonne, si agitava, non ne poteva più di stare nella flatland. Le linee di fiumi e strade erano sbarre di prigione. Spezzarle. Spezzarle e divenire realtà. Il progetto spingeva, urtava, scuoteva la parete della terza dimensione, bagnava la grana della carta col suo sudore bollente, e il foglio sobbalzava, si innalzava, si inarcava, facendo tremare il tavolo” (*Un viaggio* 61–2). See the following passage, which is also an example of how, in the sequences related to the entity, the register is higher: “L’Entità sognava sé stessa, andava innanzi un fotogramma dopo l’altro e sognava sé stessa in un futuro imminente, si sognava incumbente, in bilico sulle vite di ogni essere in quella valle, si sognava inevitabile, ineluttabilmente dietro ogni angolo di ogni esistenza, perché l’avvenire era scritto, cronoprogrammato. L’Entità aveva deposto uova di recinto, dalle quali nascevano spire di filo-rasoio fremente, e distese di plastica arancione, e si sognava già cantiere, compiuto, inconfondibile cantiere congiunto all’autostrada, una missione comune nel regno minerale, svincoli e ferro e lamiere su asfalto, e un buco nella roccia dell’Ambin, e una talpa meccanica a scavarlo” (*Un viaggio* 344).



The ways Wu Ming 1 has the Entity “haunt” the language of the book and make its presence felt reproduce its capacity to haunt the environment surrounding the railway construction site and embed its standpoint in its materiality. The Entity is able to possess human or nonhuman beings, like trees. It flies around the valley and is at the same time far from its inhabitants and close enough to listen to their heart bits: “L’Entità era nell’aria, fluttuava sopra la valle, ne ascoltava le voci e auscultava i cuori” (117). It dwells in the natural environment of the valley, taking possession of it. For example, when it stops close to Avigliana, a city situated at the entrance of the Susa valley, she hides “in un antro di fango e sterpi nella palude dei Mareschi” (104). The Entity merges with the swamp, possesses it, and absorbs negative energy from the history of its surroundings, where a Nobel factory used to produce explosives: “In quel meandro di mondo, l’Entità ricaricava le energie sfruttando il *genius loci*, assorbendo le memorie, amplificando gli echi di tutte le esplosioni di tutti gli ordigni fabbricati allo stabilimento Nobel nell’arco di cent’anni” (104). The Entity uses this energy to generate monstrous daughters—hybrids of human body-parts, insects and traits of media stakeholders (467)—and “defecare mille repliche di sé stessa” that secrete “recinti e spire di barbed tape, nastro spinato, o meglio ancora razor wire, filo-rasoio” (176).

The Entity takes possession of the material and affective forces of the environment in order to design material (e.g., razor wire) *and* discursive instruments of control:

...facendo nascere e imbizzarrire uragani di pulviscolo e parole, tornado di slogan e nomi vacui che fuoriuscivano dall’antro e correvano per la valle, non visti da nessuno ma sentiti da tutti, e ovunque arrivassero consumavano l’attenzione, dissipavano le energie da dedicare alla lotta ... Ecco il piano dell’Entità: confondere, ottundere, fiaccare. E al momento buono, tornare in valle coi recinti, le ruspe, le talpe. (104)

The Entity enacts an agential role that cannot be assigned to any individual (non)human figure, but is distributed, performed by an ensemble of material and discursive forces (Bennett 21). Its agency is not an attribute, but an enactment, a doing, a process of continuous material-discursive reconfigurations (Barad 141) that aim at exploiting and enslaving the environment of the Susa valley. In the passage just quoted, Wu Ming 1 articulates the material-discursive agency of the Entity through hyperboles that hybridize different semantic domains, e.g., “imbizzarrire” (animal kingdom) “uragani” (natural phenomena) “di pulviscolo” (material world) “e parole” (language); metaphoric expressions like “tornado di slogan;” personifications “nomi...che fuoriuscivano...e correavano;” and synesthetic locutions that, using the verb *sentire*—the equivalent in Italian for both feeling and hearing but also, more extensively, smelling or tasting—blur the boundary between affective and discursive responses to the Entity’s enslaving practices.

The modalities of the response of the No TAV movement to the Entity are for Wu Ming 1 an object of constant reflection accompanying the representation of the Entity. Wu Ming 1 generally portrays the No TAV resistance as a performative effort of human and nonhuman, material and immaterial, discursive and non-discursive forces: activists, non-violent practices, riots, land occupations, books, elves, legends, “folletti e fantasmi nei boschi...Belenos e padre Pio,” Mapuche rituals and “alleati cosmici” that include ancient pagan beliefs and the figures of God and Christ (474, 476, 513). The key point of this characterization is on the one hand to convey the complexity of the Entity and, on the other, to substantiate the argument that the Entity must be resisted by developing an alternative network of material and discursive forces as dense and ramified as the enslaving one.

Wu Ming 1’s reflection upon the modalities of this resistance, and the eventuality of finally eliminating this Entity, is expressed through an imaginary epistolary exchange between

him, the writer Alberto Prunetti and their mentor, H. P. Lovecraft. We need to ponder this exchange insofar as it provides a link between Wu Ming 1's reflection and Wu Ming 2's engagement in the practice of walking in the *sentieri* series (section 3.5). Recognizing this link is key to understanding how the latter practice is programmatically aimed at undermining the machinic forms of exploitation that the Entity—the neoliberal system of power relations in Wu Ming's view—imposes on the environment.

In his letter, Prunetti wonders whether the No TAV collective efforts will finally kill the Entity. He is inspired by how bees cooperatively defend their hive against sphinx butterflies, attacking them collectively and suffocating them. He proposes this strategy as a solution against the Entity, which will die “soffocata dalla ribellione operosa di una moltitudine di api in lotta” (559).<sup>40</sup> Lovecraft builds on Prunetti's post-anthropocentric approach to the fight against the Entity and imagines a massive attack of bees against it, “quell'immateriale escrescenza della società spettacolare-mercantile, una società che divora il futuro come Crono divorò i propri figli” (578). For Lovecraft, the Entity is “Chronos, *Κρόνος*, il dio del Tempo, il tempo che viene imposto” by neoliberal powers on the valley and its (non)human inhabitants through programs, schedules, deadlines and postponements. The challenge for the No TAV movement is to re-imagine and re-appropriate the future that the Entity-Chronos devoured, “per avviare un nuovo tempo,” new life rhythms (578).

However, these rhythms are not to be exclusively human. Prunetti's proposal is more than just a metaphor. It embodies the need to think of these new temporalities as eco-centric and

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<sup>40</sup> “Un altro nemico delle api è la farfalla Sfinge testa di morto (*Acherontia Atropos*), che ha abitudini crepuscolari quasi vampiresche ed emette uno strano sibilo che spesso riesce a inibire le proprie vittime, direi quasi a mesmerizzarle, rendendole sonnambule. È piuttosto resistente al veleno dei pungiglioni e riesce a entrare nelle arnie per nutrirsi del miele, devastando i favi. Per difendersi, centinaia di api le si stringono contro con una mossa aggirante fino a soffocarla. Questa strategia di un abbraccio a spirale potrebbe funzionare contro l'Entità, che prima o poi potrebbe rimanere a giacere in Valle, soffocata dalla ribellione operosa di una moltitudine di api in lotta, imbalsamata con la propoli, in un ammasso di ragnatele ed escrementi” (*Un viaggio*, 558–9).

develop them according to machinic networks of human and nonhuman needs that are not enslaved by neoliberal logics of constant acceleration. As Lovecraft's reply reads:

per conseguire l'essenza della vera esteriorità, esteriorità di tempo, spazio o dimensione, lo scrittore deve scordarsi che esistono la vita organica, la bontà, la cattiveria, l'amore, l'odio e altri consimili attributi locali di una specie animale temporanea e negligibile chiamata *umanità* ... Per questo mi intriga quell'idea di finale: Chronos ucciso da una specie non umana. A condizione, raccomanderei, che nemmeno il movente sia umano. (579)

The letter exchange between Wu Ming 1, Prunetti and Lovecraft is a key passage in Wu Ming's experimental forms of expressions, as it encourages the reader to imagine an existential alternative to the hegemony of the Entity from an eco-centric perspective. The letters, however, as reflections upon the activism of the No TAV movement, also gesture to the fact that merely imagining this alternative, and therefore confining its actualization within the boundaries of the literary text and the reading experience, is not enough. This alternative must be imagined *and* enacted in the material space of the environment and its temporal dimension. The possibility that imagining our encounter with the world from an eco-centric perspective opens is twofold: first, the possibility of realizing that an alternative to the model of subjectivity imposed by neoliberal apparatuses exists; and, second, the possibility of designing life rhythms and temporal practices according to speeds informed by post-anthropocentric relationalities. How can this ethical opening of the human self to the nonhuman temporalities of matter and the environment possibly become a materially embodied act, a practice in the material world?

### 3.5. Walking: Exploring Existential Alternatives beyond the Boundaries of the Text

In *Il sentiero degli dei* (SD) and *Il sentiero luminoso* (SL) exploring alternative existential territories and opening the self to other temporalities is not confined within the boundaries of the text, but continues and concretizes in practices, actions and forms of embodied engagement. This is what Wu Ming 2 defines “sentierismo militante” (SL 279). The two books account for two long hikes the author did, the first from Bologna to Florence on the *Via degli Dei* and the second from Bologna to Milan. These books and the forms of embodied activism related to them further my analysis of Wu Ming’s intervention because they reveal a change in their approach to the production of alternative subjectivities and its influence on elaborations of forms of literary expressions. At this stage of their activism, their idea of production of subjectivity is confined neither within a narrative dialogic dimension, nor in intra-actions between narrative standpoints, but contemplates the need to enact this process through forms of embodied engagement. The ethical and existential opening of the self to the nonhuman other is still a process for the reader (and the author) to be imagined. Yet now the imagination of this possibility aims to engender a different kind of cognitive and affective experience, embodied and enacted in the material world. This experience ultimately consists of a slowed-down encounter between the human hiker and the material dimension of the environment. It should be emphasized immediately, however, that this is not simply a move away from literature (i.e., imaginative experience) and toward the environment (i.e., physical experience). Rather it is an interaction between these two kinds of experience (both eminently “real”) so one becomes the extension of the other *and vice versa*.

In these two books, the practice of walking represents a sustainable alternative to high-speed approaches to the environment (e.g., TAV) informed by machinic networks of

exploitation.<sup>41</sup> For Gerolamo, the author's alter ego in both *Il sentiero degli dei* and *Il sentiero luminoso*, walking between Bologna and Florence, is “un'azione di soccorso” (SD 20) that aims to rescue the ecosystem from being ignored, account for the devastations caused by its exploitation, and value all the stories its history contains. Moreover, as Gerolamo's friend Nico says in the first book, the practice of walking is “l'unico modo di spostarsi adottato dall'uomo che si basi su una perdita d'equilibrio: spingere il centro di gravità oltre il limite di sicurezza” (SD 33). Walking, therefore, entails a process of self-questioning, self-unbalancing, ultimately necessary for imagining *and* embodying post-humanist approaches to the materiality of the environment. As Gerolamo will acknowledge later in the book, walking and encountering the material world at a different speed affect human perceptions and the functioning of the brain, “come se a forza di camminare, dalla mattina alla sera, ci si ritrovasse addosso una seconda natura, ma forse è solo l'effetto di qualche neurotrasmettitore che inonda il cervello quando si fanno girare le gambe e si guarda il mondo a cinque chilometri all'ora” (SD 93). In sum, the practice of walking in Wu Ming 2's works is an embodied form of exploration that programmatically breaks with high-speed approaches to human transportation and calls for creative experiments with alternative life rhythms informed by alternative relationalities.

In Wu Ming 2's two books, the creative experiments with slowed-down life rhythms go in two directions. First, pauses during the hikes engender moments of reflection upon the possibility of listening to the environment and dwelling into our responses to it. This first direction therefore re-elaborates the idea of dialogic dimension in a post-anthropocentric fashion

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<sup>41</sup> The TAV brings the passenger from Bologna to Florence in only thirty-five minutes. The realization of this infrastructure caused irreversible consequences for the Apennine ecosystem—for example the drainage of water streams and springs—and its (non)human inhabitants. Moreover, the reduction of the duration of the trip between the two cities required the excavation of long tunnels across the mountains that cover 93% of the route. These tunnels deeply affect the experience of the traveler, which is surrounded by darkness for most of the time, does not see anything from her window and focuses exclusively on her destination, as if nothing were in-between.

that posits the communicative potential of matter, its agential dynamism and also values the acts of listening, besides that of enunciation, in the production of subjectivity. The second direction consists in accompanying the author in the process of negotiating with the environment as he makes his path without, however, providing the kind of details that would allow the reader simply to retrace it. This approach calls for the reader's engagement in the practice of designing her own path: we are encouraged to get out of our comfort zone and walk. The possibility of producing alternative subjectivities is not only to be imagined, but also enacted by engaging in an embodied cognitive endeavor. These alternatives are informed by our ethical availability to *listen to* the environment, but this availability must produce embodied knowledge and contribute to bringing about innovative forms of political praxis (see Chapter 4).

In *Il sentiero degli dei*, “la trama del libro è il semplice susseguirsi dei passi e il protagonista [Gerolamo] è una mano tesa al lettore, per invitarlo a camminare” (SD 7). Walking is here a metonymical expression that asks the reader not to think of the perspective of the author, Gerolamo, or of the extra-diegetic narrator who tells the story as absolute and all-encompassing. For Gerolamo, walking “unisce il cielo e la strada, la vista panoramica da una vetta e lo sguardo soffocato in un bosco” (SD 57). In my interpretation, this type of walking entails exploring matter from multiple and constantly becoming perspectives and giving the self the time to open to it in order to learn from the stories it contains. Learning these stories about, for instance, the project of the TAV, its impact on the ecosystem and the death of railway and construction workers in that area is key for Gerolamo's (and the reader's) understanding of the complex machinic networks that enslave and exploit matter and (non)human bodies. The encounter between Gerolamo and the material environment is therefore what could make these stories emerge, provided that one is open to listening to *voices* that are not exclusively human:

“L’autostrada, in lontananza, fa udire il suo respiro, ma il vento porta anche altri suoni, se li si vuole ascoltare” (*SD* 67).

During the night between the second and the third stage of the trip, Gerolamo is taking a stroll, but the narrator temporarily disregards the actions of the character. The narrative voice instead reflects upon the capacity of water to register and memorize material and sound wave interactions: “Dicono che l’acqua ha una sua memoria, come il silicio e i nastri magnetici e la superficie dei compact disc ... Masaru Emoto sostiene addirittura che i suoni, la voce umana e le onde cerebrali lasciano nell’acqua una traccia che poi si manifesta coi cristalli di ghiaccio” (*SD* 68). For the narrator, water is a nonhuman archive that permeates human bodies and nonhuman organisms like trees: “Forse la pioggia e i torrenti impregnano coi loro archivi anche la terra, l’erba, gli alberi” (*SD* 68). The rocks, grass and trees of the Apennine ecosystem, where the construction of the railway line Direttissima in the 1920s required the excavation of tunnels, are for the narrator the material carriers of the sound waves generated by the construction. The vibrations caused by explosives, fires, the cries of the workers who died in several accidents and the popular songs sung by the miners produced sound waves that the water registered and transmitted to the material environment, including trees whose “legno ha assorbito nutrimenti e ricordi, per poi tradurli nella sua lingua di nodi, rami e biforcazioni, che il vento ora legge e trasmette, come la puntina di un vecchio giradischi sui solchi del vinile” (*SD* 69–70).<sup>42</sup>

The episode articulates the encounter between the hiker and the material dimension of the environment in terms of listening. From the post-humanist perspective of my analysis, this

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<sup>42</sup> “Ottanta cerchi fa, l’acqua delle sorgive ha registrato le vibrazioni della roccia, causate dall’esplosione delle cariche e dalle voci dei minatori. Le sorgive hanno alimentato i ruscelli e l’umidità dei ruscelli ha nutrito gli alberi. Terra e radici hanno succhiato la memoria dell’acqua e con l’aggiunta di sali minerali l’hanno trasformata in linfa. I vasi dello xilema hanno aspirato la linfa verso l’alto e il legno ha assorbito nutrimenti e ricordi, per poi tradurli nella sua lingua di nodi, rami e biforcazioni, che il vento ora legge e trasmette, come la puntina di un vecchio giradischi sui solchi del vinile” (*SD* 69–70).



articulation suggests a different approach to Lazzarato's theory of the dialogic exchange, as here matter is not a mere component whose relevance is measured according to its contribution to human enunciation. Matter is *the* enunciator and its enunciation is not primarily actualized by verbal language, but by the material reconfigurations of water, rocks and trees that in the past *responded* to the sound waves generated by the events. The dialogic dimension in which Gerolamo and the reader are asked to enter therefore enacts a post-anthropocentric relationality, where matter, endowed with "lively impetus" (Oppermann 29) and "intrinsic performativity" (Iovino 58), is the agent that responds to material, affective and discursive forces and crystallizes them in its molecules. The narrative voice, which at last translates the "dendrofonie raccontate dal vento" (*SD* 70) into linguistic "dendroserie" (*SD* 75), is therefore a complex assemblage of enunciation that elaborates "coemergent and ontologically hybrid forms of expressions" (Oppermann 30), human and nonhuman. The shape of branches, nodes and tree rings are, in the words of the eco-critic Serenella Iovino, "configurations of meanings and discourses" that the narrator actualizes as stories and narratives in order to account for the dynamism of matter (in Oppermann 29).

The practice of listening to and making sense of these dendrophonies, however, is not straightforward. Through the voice of the narrator, the episode defines listening to the environment as a complex cognitive experience that requires imaginary and material tools. First of all, the text calls for the reader to be *there*, outside of the text, and open her body to the multisensorial stimuli coming from the environment. Being there, however, as a tourist or an engineer projecting the TAV would be, is not enough. The narrator underlines how Gerolamo, the fictional character that *is* there, may be able to perceive the sounds generated by the wind, but cannot understand it. As the protagonist will acknowledge later in the book, it is "inutile farsi

illusioni: non basta andare a piedi” (*SD* 110) to leave the deaf neoliberal world behind. One has to carry out an act of self-positioning, open oneself to the environment without ambitions of mastery or nostalgic claims for what is lost, “oltre il chiasso dei motori a scoppio, dei fucili e degli inni sacri per la Natura perduta” (*SD* 111). Moreover, in the episode the narrator imagines what Gerolamo would know if he could understand the dendrophonies (“Se tu sapessi ascoltarli, Gerolamo ... Se la capissi, Gerolamo, questa musica d’acqua e di legno, di terra e di vento, se tu la sapessi ascoltare, distingueresti...” (*SD* 69–70)) and therefore points at human imagination, and consequently at the capacity of literary texts to stimulate it, as a fundamental faculty for conceiving possible forms of (non)human communication.

And yet the practice of listening to matter must be grounded in the ability to decode the information contained in its material manifestation. Decoding this information requires transdisciplinary instruments and material tools that are not necessarily human and implies forms of knowledge that cross the boundaries of the literary domain. In the episode described, the narrator mentions how the use of a Pressler gimlet would allow Gerolamo to date the memories of trees. Moreover, later in the book, the genealogy of the artificial lake Bilancino in the Mugello area represents an example of transdisciplinary listening that engenders a fairly sustainable form of cohabitation between human and nonhuman needs. Before excavating the basin, geologists discovered that, seven hundred thousand years ago, the whole area “era coperto da un bacino lacustre, che poi ruppe l’invaso e si svuotò, lasciando strati di ghiaia lungo le antiche rive” (*SD* 113). Bilancino lake seems so natural to Gerolamo—“sembra essere lì da sempre” (*SD* 113)—because the ecosystem already *knows* how to deal with a water basin. The lake does not affect the area as badly as the TAV, the well-known Mugello motor-race track, the highway, and a

huge shopping mall because its presence was already scripted into the molecular structure of the ecosystem.<sup>43</sup>

In my analysis of Wu Ming's forms of intervention, their insistence on the need for a practice of listening to the environment is a metonymical call for a more sensitive approach to its needs. Developing this approach is fundamental for understanding the complex set of material and discursive forces that exploit and enslave the environment and its inhabitants as part of machinic networks. Developing this approach is also necessary for imagining and enacting more sustainable relationalities and therefore linking literary forms of intervention to materially embodied practices.

*Il sentiero luminoso* is the next step in Wu Ming 2's *sentieri* series. This book furthers the scope of Wu Ming's call to listen to matter and reflects upon the impact of developing these practices of listening on the production of subjectivity. In *Il sentiero luminoso*, Wu Ming 2 expresses the need for conceiving of human and nonhuman subjectivities as relational beings whose entanglements are neither anthropocentric nor centered on any particular entity. The author formulates a critique of anthropocentrism that also imagines an alternative approach, on the one hand, to humanism and, on the other hand, to skeptical nihilism. In the following passage, a quotation from a book about the Pallavicino family stands in for the humanist organization of matter (e.g., cities) around a human centre, while the words uttered by the usher of Cortemaggiore's town hall nihilistically reduce the search for a position in the world to a senseless effort:

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<sup>43</sup> "Dunque è possibile, pensa Gerolamo, far nascere un lago dove la Terra dice «lago», bucare una montagna solo se lei stessa è d'accordo e imparare a domandarle un parere non solo con sondaggi e modelli matematici, ma interpretando le storie e le geografie di una valle. Aprire le orecchie e ascoltare la voce dei luoghi, invece di costruire viadotti e gallerie per onorare gli impegni presi con i telespettatori, disegnando autostrade su una lavagna a fogli, come se l'Italia fosse il deserto del Gobi" (*SD* 113).

– L’uomo è un merlo – dice [l’usciera] – Salta. Di qua, di là. Ma il senso non lo trova. Non lo trova lo stesso.

Mi vengono in mente le parole che ho letto ieri sera, prima d’addormentarmi, in un libro sui Pallavicino e sulla loro capitale: ‘Una città costruita per mettere l’uomo al centro dell’universo.’ Tra umanesimo e filosofia del merlo, chissà se c’è spazio per il sentierismo, dove invece di saltare qua e là, si cammina, e invece di un centro, c’è una rotta clandestina. (*SL* 195)

For Wu Ming 2, *sentierismo* is neither a humanist nor an anti-humanist approach to the concept of subjectivity. *Sentierismo* does not imagine the human subject as the center of the universe or an entity totally detached from it, but rather a relational being in constant becoming (“si cammina”) and that builds an alternative existential path (“rotta clandestina”). Rather than an abstract theoretical definition of subjectivity, I see in Wu Ming 2’s idea of *sentierismo* a proposal for the design of alternative forms of embodied engagement able to affect the production of subjectivity and (non)human relationalities. The construction of the path is a metaphor for the acts of self-positioning in the current system of power relations that the production of subjectivity requires, but also a metonymy for the practical need of drawing a path in the material dimension and walking it beyond the boundaries of the text.

The textual elaboration of *sentierismo* in *Il sentiero luminoso* embodies its metaphorical and metonymical senses. The whole story of Gerolamo’s encounter with the environment in this book is told by him in the first-person. Choosing a first-person singular narrator does not constitute a self-celebratory move, but a more explicit act of self-positioning that calls for the readers’ active responses (*SL* 9–10). Gerolamo never gives the full details of the paths he takes, but rather asks the reader—addressed by the plural pronoun *voi*, as if she was not an individual,

but a post-humanist composition of a plurality of agencies—to create her own path and position herself in material-discursive entanglements with her environment. As Gerolamo explains in the first chapter, *Preparativi #1*, “le pagine che state sfogliando non formano una guida al Sentiero Luminoso. Sono invece un’esortazione per aspiranti sentieristi. Terminata la lettura, non sarete in grado di riprodurre sulla mappa il mio sentiero ... ma forse vi prenderà la voglia di tracciarne uno vostro” (SL 12). Drawing a path does not simply mean drawing a line on a map. It is a material-discursive practice that opposes one’s own embodied sensibility to the exploitation of the environment: “Nessun vincolo tracciato sulla carta riesce a trattenere la speculazione. Chi vuole opporle un confine, deve imparare a scriverlo col corpo” (SL 11–12).

The structure of the book echoes the need to approach the practice of walking on both the material and discursive dimension, as a constantly becoming form of being *there* between Bologna and Milan, but also as a challenge to the discursive representations that reduce that space to high-speed transportation networks (e.g., the TAV and one of the most trafficked highways in Italy). The chapters that, similarly to *Il sentiero degli dei*, tell the stories of Gerolamo’s stages between Bologna and Milan alternate with five sections of *Preparativi* in which Gerolamo presents how he defined its path before leaving. Differently from the *Via degli dei*, which Gerolamo/Wu Ming 2 walked in the previous book, this path is not marked, does not exist, and the protagonist has to build it himself. The process of looking for trails on paper and digital maps—whose criteria of representation are affected by discursive factors (e.g., the private or public organization that realized it)—is the first discursive encounter with the environment that will be coupled with its material exploration. The five chapters present this process as an ongoing, performative enactment, entangled with the other chapters that account for the encounter with the environment in the material dimension.

Furthermore, constructing the path is not a solitary process that reinstates the centrality of the humanist subject as the unique human agency in charge of the process. It is a collective endeavor that entangles the agencies of technological tools and Wu Ming 2's human followers who helped him with suggestions, advice and information. Maps and online applications like Google Earth are key for realizing this task. Gerolamo engages with these instruments, criticizing how the maps drawn by a private gaze (e.g., Google's) have been identified with, in Barad's words, the "matter that comes to matter" (SL 222). In opposition to this neoliberal drift, Gerolamo compares and contrasts Google maps with public organizations cartographies or open-source applications that report contributions by cyclists, excursionists and hikers in general. Then, during the trip, the protagonist carries the whole set of information he gathers in a small tool called "*al zavaj* (l'aggeggio)" (SL 37), an object with which he interacts as if it were a character. *Al zavaj* shows Gerolamo his position on the map, and functions as a compass as well as an altimeter. It is an instrument of orientation whose agency is fundamental for the performative construction of the path and the human acts of self-positioning in the environment that surrounds it.

The (non)human assemblage that constructs this path therefore extends beyond the boundaries of the narrative frame. In the two years before the excursion (2013–15), the author and the *giapster* Matteo Toller used different media platforms, including Wu Ming's blog *Giap*, Twitter (with the hashtag #LuminosoBoMi) and a Tumblr page, to ask suggestions, advice, information, feedback about hypothetical trails and share Wu Ming 2's provisional maps. Even though the walk is mostly solitary, except in the last stages shared with some friends, and narrated by a first-person narrator, which may suggest an excessive focus on the individual dimension of the experience, the collaborative definition of the path situates the individual

agency in a multimedia network of exchange. These exchanges performatively participate in the enactment of the *sentiero luminoso* as much as Wu Ming 2's walk does. The two-year cooperative research, their elaboration, the provisional routes commented on *Giap* and the Tumblr page, the path recorded on the maps in *al zavaj*, the unexpected discoveries during the never-fully planned excursion, all make the *sentiero luminoso* a performative practice of existential exploration.

In this exploratory performance, plural (non)human agencies are mutually entangled, cooperate and intra-act, as Barad would say, to bring about different forms of relationality and ontologically hybrid processes of subjectivation. The *sentieri* series leads to a new section of my cartography of Wu Ming's interventions, where the focus will shift from the effort to imagine alternative subjectivities to the struggle to produce such subjectivities as part of a political praxis. It should be emphasized that this shift in focus is due only to the fact that imagining and producing are inherently linked and feed into each other. Wu Ming's literary works significantly contributed to their project by offering them and their readers the possibility to imagine an alternative. Wu Ming's forms of expression actualized this alternative in terms of sustainable dialogic relationalities, post-anthropocentric standpoints, reactions to networks of machinic enslavement and embodied encounters with the world. These actualizations produced knowledge and fostered cognitive experiences that, as the *sentieri* series suggests, are there to be embodied and enacted. This enactment, as Wu Ming 2's definition of the path indicate, will entail the coordination of a complex assemblage of (non)human agencies—indeed the creation of alternative material, discursive, human, nonhuman, online, offline machinic networks that are ready to fight against the neoliberal apparatuses of social subjection and machinic enslavement.

## Chapter 4

### Machinic Assemblages of Political Interventions across Transmedia Networks

#### Introduction

In Lazzarato's analysis of contemporary forms of production of subjectivity, the creative and exploratory approach of the aesthetic paradigm is a valuable resource for the organization of political actions against neoliberal apparatuses of social subjection and machinic enslavement. Lazzarato maintains that "political action must construct and invent tools and procedures of experimentation, research and intervention aimed first of all at the production of subjectivity" (*Signs* 219). From this perspective, it becomes evident that artistic forms of expression should be key in sustaining political interventions insofar as works of imagination are ideal for exploring alternative existential domains in a creative way. Wu Ming's sustained interest in literature now emerges as fully consistent with their concern over defining relational subjectivity and the collective's exploration of alternative existential domains. Yet, the political significance of these literary endeavours and the way they energize and are in turn energized by other material, linguistic and discursive interventions remain to be explored. Ultimately, the aim is to understand how Wu Ming's activism in and through all its manifestations helps enact machinic relations that undermine neoliberal apparatuses and produce an alternative.

#### 4.1. From Collectivities to Machinic Assemblages and Back Again

Lazzarato argues that strikes, revolts or riots are the political practices that represent the experimental approach of the aesthetic paradigm most effectively (*Signs* 223). These practices



constitute acts of self-positioning that break with established models of subjectivation. They “open the possibility for constructing new languages, new knowledge, new aesthetic practices and new forms of life ... suspend time for a brief moment and create other possibilities from which, if they take on consistency, other subjectivations and existential crystallizations might proliferate” (*Signs* 223). As Joss Hands claims in *@ Is for Activism*, acts of rebellion constitute affirmative actions that, unrestricted by manifestations of dissent, cooperatively and collectively elaborate alternative solutions to constraining situations (5). As Lazzarato and Hands seem to suggest, revolts generate the embodied and existential entanglements that trigger material, affective and discursive processes of subjectivity production.

However, the discussion of Wu Ming’s involvement in the G8 protest revealed both the performative potential and flaws of the oppositional logic the Genoa events expressed. My reflection on the *tute bianche* shortcomings, especially the Manifesto articulating their stance, generated a new understanding: in order to break with neoliberal apparatuses of subjection and enslavement, political interventions must deconstruct dualist antagonisms, be complex, evolve continuously and be ethically informed by an opening to (non)human agencies contributions. This imperative raises the challenging theoretical issue of the nature and functioning of machinic assemblages. My angle for analyzing this issue will begin by considering what some influential theorists have proposed as the foundations of new political practices that are diverse, complex and fluid enough to effectively disrupt the contemporary neoliberal order.

Drawing on Guattari’s thought, Nicholas Thoburn argues, as we have done in the previous chapters, that political practice must be disarticulated from oppositional logics relying on the construction of a “coherent collective subjectivity” (“What” 113). He then proposes this can be achieved via political initiatives developing an ecological orientation “toward the

discontinuous and multilayered arrangements”—what I have called *assemblages* in the previous chapter—“that traverse and compose social life” (“What” 113). In his view, these “associated political articulations...are machinic in nature.” They therefore result from a composition of (non)human material, immaterial and affective agencies enacted by “technological apparatus[es], medias...images, moods and atmospheres, economic instruments, sonorous fields, landscapes, aesthetic artefacts...human bodies, subjective dispositions and cognitive and affective refrains” (“What” 113). Political change will finally emerge from the creation and mobilization of these “multiple and diffuse social arrangements,” or machinic assemblages, whose openness to (non)human others should be maintained to not “fall into the calcified self-assurance of militant subjectivity” (“What” 114).

Theoretically, Lazzarato and Thoburn connect the ethical opening to (non)human others to forms of political activism. Yet, they do not specify how plural agencies constituting the assemblages can concretely organize and coordinate themselves in political action. For Hands, who operates a radical interpretation of Jürgen Habermas’ theory of communicative action, acts of communication must organize and coordinate the multiplicity of agencies composing these assemblages (175). Any (non)human agency in an act of communication—either a human being speaking or a computer transmitting information according to TCP/IP protocols (89)—relies on the possibility that participants reach an understanding, an agreement, a common point in the exchange. In Habermas’ ethics of communication, this possibility is a value that those entering the argument necessarily share. It is this value, rather than actual agreement, that engenders a confrontation process between different perspectives that creatively think about possible solutions respecting all participants’ viewpoints (16–17). This confrontation process values differences and may also entail antagonism, disagreement, conflict (17). In it, participants

mutually recognize the others' viewpoints in order to foster the formation of political assemblages able to intervene in the public sphere (88).

For Hands, contemporary online technologies' design and structure enhances the formation of communication networks and allows multiple (non)human actors to connect and enact intersubjective recognition (90). In Ian Hutchby's words, the technological design and structure must have "functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object" (444). These *technological affordances* (as I will call them) "may be both shaped by and shaping of the practices humans use in interaction with, around and through them" (444). Hands' interpretation of Habermas' theory views these technological affordances' agencies as enclosed in the set of validity claims. For the German philosopher, these claims regulate communicative rationality—truth, truthfulness, rightness and comprehensibility. For instance, the Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) system is a "set of protocols that allows computer to communicate with each other directly" (83) on the Internet according to "the validity claim of comprehensibility" (90). This claim entails "intrinsic consensual actions that contain background claims to truthfulness and rightness, because of their basic linking practices and distributed topology" (90). In other words, for Hands communication is a relational dynamic where agencies recognize each other by their rational communicative behavior.

In Tiziana Terranova' critique of Habermas' rational approach to communication, understanding it in the contemporary media networks context entails considering the material and affective agencies that inform, in Lazzarato's terminology, participants' self-positioning acts in the dialogic dimension. In *Network Culture*, Terranova maintains that the contemporary media environment, as a space of communication, is "the site of a permanent conflict" informed by

strategies of “media warfare” controlled by different powers (134). In this context, alternative spaces of communication must be appropriated, designed, constructed, not simply through “the exercise of an abstract faculty of reason, but also a very material engagement with relations of composition and decomposition between affectively charged and often competing *beliefs*” (156). The challenge for this form of engagement is “to synthesize not so much a common position...but a common *passion* giving rise to a distributed movement able to displace the limits and terms within which the political constitution of the future is played out” (156).

The cooperative enactment of an alternative communication space entails perceiving communicative acts as affectively and materially charged relational practices that engender the sharing of ideas, information, knowledge, affects and experiences. The technological affordances of online communication networks foster this dynamic in terms of circulation and sharing of content. (Non)human actors participate in the dialogic dimensions designed by these networks by performatively producing the content and information they share. They do not simply use or consume it. As Virginia Nightingale and Karen Ross report, media scholars generally agree that online media blur the distinction between producers and consumers of content and transform passive audiences into active agents (10). This producer-consumer dynamic led to the creation of the neologisms *producers* or *prosumers* (Nightingale and Ross 10).

As Henry Jenkins argues in *Convergent Culture*, grassroots audiences participate in the production and consumption of content by actively circulating it across different media (20). The increasing circulation of content, ideas and information encourages audiences to converge on knowledge communities (*fan groups* in Jenkins’ model). These share mutual intellectual interests, collaboratively work toward a consensus on the social nature of media consumption and reflect on how their knowledge can become instrumental to changing the power relations

involved in activities they do (27). This power, however, as the American scholar explains, does not simply rely on cognitive or informational bonds between grassroots. In the context of “affective economics” where fan communities develop, the media industry “seeks to understand the emotional underpinnings of consumer decision-making as a driving force behind viewing and purchasing decisions” (62). New marketing strategies “seek to expand consumer’s emotional...investments with the goal of shaping consumption patterns” (63). Yet doing this also empowers targeted groups to form affective bonds on which grassroots can “form their own kind of collective bargaining structure that they can use to challenge corporate decisions” (63). Participation in knowledge sharing practices and in the creation of affective bonds is fundamental for grassroots to “bring the flow of media more fully under their control” and raise “expectations of a freer flow of ideas and content” (20).

However, Elizabeth Bird warns against an acritical appraisal of online *prosumers*’ agency, as their empowerment by media industry may conceal subtler forms of control. While media stakeholders “certainly respond to fan demands, [they] have also learned quickly to co-opt fan activities and viral media...today marketers have simply found creative ways to harness the enthusiasm of active media audiences in order to sell [their product] to them more effectively” (507). The commodification of cultural content, online services and tools, users’ data and information and advertising spaces are examples of this process. As I have argued in previous chapters via Lazzarato, media industry enslaves machinic assemblages and communication networks to consolidate neoliberal control over cultural production processes. This ultimately strengthens the proliferation of neoliberal ideology. For Marisol Sandoval and Christian Fuchs, “participation can be used as a means of profit accumulation” and does not entail any emancipation from neoliberal cultural norms and practices (144). These practices do not merely

subsume deviant subjectivities and behaviours. They also foster “la diffusione pervasiva di automatismi cognitivi” by producing “interfacce tecno-sociali,” like social networks, “che precostituiscono i percorsi cognitivi e il comportamento sociale in modo da renderli funzionali” (Berardi 151). We must then return to the basic question and reformulate it. How can affective, material, linguistic and discursive (non)human forces enact an alternative to machinic enslavement? How can participatory practices be implemented in emancipatory fashion?

This chapter does not aim to resolve such theoretical debates nor provide a definitive answer to these questions. Rather, it analyzes how Wu Ming experiment with affordances of different online and offline media to create alternative political actions and subjectivities. Section 4.2 focuses on Wu Ming’s implementation of copy-left policies and how this discursive intervention challenges neoliberal privatizations of cultural content. Wu Ming’s use of copy-left policies reflects the basic principle of their transmedia activism: the promotion of sharing practices. These practices constitute the core political praxis the collective promotes through transmedia entanglements of linguistic and material interventions. Section 4.3 will concentrate on how Wu Ming and their followers co-construct a space of communication and sharing around the collective’s newsletter, the *Giap* blog, and Twitter. While the construction of this dialogic dimension is predominantly bound to linguistic forms of participation, the material and affective entanglements between the members of the collective and their followers emerge from a joint analysis of these online practices and offline forms of embodied engagement. Section 4.4 will portray Wu Ming’s coordination of the #Renziscappa hashtag campaign as an example of how their online presence is programmatically aimed at fostering the entanglement between online and offline participation practices. Finally, sections 4.5 and 4.6 will explore how Wu Ming’s focus on the temporal dimensions of online and offline practices further promotes this

entanglement. Alternative temporal approaches to life rhythms imposed by the apparatus of machinic enslavement disrupt the latter at the molecular level. They ultimately play a key role in actualizing the formation of (non)human political assemblages and the projection of an alternative future.

#### 4.2. Sharing Is Caring: Wu Ming's Implementation of Copy-Left Policies

The political interventions Wu Ming carried out across online and offline transmedia networks are grounded in a core and fundamental principle: freely sharing and circulating cultural content is a challenge to neoliberal exploitation of this content and the machinic networks that disseminate it. Since creating their website ([wumingfoundation.com](http://wumingfoundation.com)), Wu Ming experimented with the technological affordances of online communication networks and offline media. This permitted them to promote and stimulate the sharing of their cultural productions and information, thoughts, knowledge, affects and experiences from which such productions emerge. Understanding the collective's strategies for putting sharing principles into practice—and thereby challenging neoliberal apparatuses—is key and necessary for following the trajectory of their interventions across the territory of transmedia networks.

The choice of protecting their cultural productions with copy-left licenses is one of the most often discussed strategies Wu Ming adopted to stimulate acts of sharing and foster alternative content consumption practices. These productions include the multimedia content of their website, what is later published on their blogs and also their printed books presenting the following statement: “Si consente la riproduzione parziale o totale dell’opera ad uso personale dei lettori e la sua diffusione per via telematica purché non a scopi commerciali e a condizione che questa dicitura sia riprodotta.” As explained in Chapter 1, copy-left licenses defend content

from the capitalist logic of profit accumulation (Sevignani 437) and fight against exploitation of content producers by commercial firms that bend copy-right laws as they please (Cohen 53).

However, some Marxist media scholars are sceptical about the possibility for copy-left practices to constitute an alternative to neoliberal apparatuses. Insofar as these practices preserve the producers' control on content, they reinstate the individual right to profit from one's own labour that informs copy-right laws (Söderberg 154). Moreover, while copy-left licenses foster content circulation, they also facilitate capitalist practices of exploitation of its visibility, as the sale of advertising space (Broussard 11) or the offer of services related to copy-left products (Söderberg 33; Sevignani 437).

Copy-left licenses in themselves may not constitute a significant threat to neoliberal apparatuses. Yet, in Wu Ming's case, this legal practice consistently supports programmatic initiatives to disrupt these apparatuses from within content flows. The collective does not sell any website or blog space to advertising industries, so as to discourage any appropriation and instead promote practices against content commodification. Neoliberal approaches to its circulation enforce intellectual private property rights and ultimately a principle of exclusion that establishes the individual right to deny others a specific privilege (Fuchs, "Information" 79; Söderberg 20). As practiced by Wu Ming, copy-left licensing allows the collective to share the privilege of authorship with a multiplicity of others, thus creating a "cultural commons" and recognizing communal authorship (Jenkins, *Convergence* 137). These stances contaminate capitalist production relations with the idea of a possible alternative.

Wu Ming's copy-left policies result in fighting programmatically against private property rights naturalization as the key factor determining social relations in terms of commodity exchange. Copy-left policies undermine the capitalist logic of content commodification because



they break the barrier between content, producer, distributor and user. Insofar as they allow any of these figures to modify and duplicate content as they please, these policies help enact an alternative relationality or, even more significantly, the possibility for an alternative relationality to exist. The regulation of content circulation by copy-left policies is not necessarily subsumed to neoliberal apparatuses and can also create “viral” alternative networks that must respect the rule of not promoting commercial forms of content exchange (Söderberg 21; Sevignani 438).

The alternative networks and relationality copy-left policies help enact do not include only human actors, but also collaborative entanglements of (non)human agencies. Technological affordances of contemporary communication networks allow content users to copy information, upload/download data, send/receive files and even engage in simultaneous forms of content production, distribution and consumption (i.e., real-time editing devices) at an unprecedented dissemination rate. User exchange networks are co-enacted by human agencies and nonhuman devices those networks are rooted in. These technologies problematize restrictions imposed by copy-right laws, urging private companies to adapt to this new and changing media environment. In this mutating landscape, Wu Ming’s implementation of copy-left policies constitutes a discursive practice. This last challenges current power relations in the media industry and mobilizes machinic assemblages to bring forth the collective’s clear-cut ethico-political position: the forms of (non)human collaboration technologies allow present an opportunity for enacting alternative ethical, social and political relations to neoliberal market-driven exchanges.

Wu Ming’s implementation of copy-left policies and the surrounding theoretical debate present two key points for understanding how Wu Ming mobilized machinic networks for political purposes. Firstly, unlike open source programs, copy-left policies do not naively promote content sharing for the sake of sharing. They make an anti-profit selection of its allowed

uses and therefore orient the mobilization of machinic assemblages toward a clear political goal. Wu Ming's use of copy-left licenses did not promote unconditional freedom but constituted a self-positioning act in alternative transmedia networks which called for their followers' participation in fostering this alternative. Secondly, mere implementation of copy-left policies does not sufficiently challenge neoliberal enslavement apparatuses. It is true that downloading Wu Ming's books from their website is an immediate opposition to content privatization practices. However, this act is yet to engender embodied and affective bonds between members of the collective and their users (I may want to download the free book simply to save money for my next trip to Las Vegas). A viable and sustainable mobilization of machinic assemblages must therefore be supported by a more complex and ramified set of material and linguistic practices. The ethical and political stakes of entangling copy-left practices with other interventions are clear. The user must fully understand the ethico-political implications related to the principle of sharing, an act embodying and potentially participating in enacting an alternative to dominant system of power relations. Following the trajectory of Wu Ming's activism will indeed uncover how the collective entangles copy-left strategies with other linguistic and material practices of sharing and communication.

#### 4.3. Sharing Knowledge, Affects and Relations through Transmedia Linguistic Practices

Wu Ming's political interventions in transmedia networks experimented with creating multifaceted machinic assemblages by entangling copy-left discursive practices with linguistic and materially embodied forms of engagement. This section will focus on how the collective designed strategies that entangle linguistic practices and technological affordances to foster online sharing practices and engender forms of participation in machinic networks. Wu Ming's

most original and cutting-edge experiments with online linguistic practices are to be found in three means of communication core to their project: their newsletter and blog (both named *Giap*), and Twitter. While the newsletter issues covered the first ten years of Wu Ming's activism (2000–09), Twitter and the blog are two platforms the collective tried out simultaneously and synergistically in their second decade (2010–19). The first two subsections will present Wu Ming's experiments with the technological affordances of the newsletter and the blog, while the third will investigate the latter's relationship with Twitter.

#### 4.3.1. *Giap*: The Newsletter

In Chapter 2, the analysis of the *Giap* issue “Genova: una narrazione corale” presented Wu Ming's linguistic strategies for establishing an intense, sustained dialogue with the *giapsters*—*Giap* subscribers' initial nickname. That analysis, however, only treated features of this dialogue deserving a more thorough discussion. These are yet to be explored in relation to the definitions of participation presented in previous sections. Exploring Wu Ming's experiments with the technological affordances of the newsletter will allow us to encounter preliminary strategies the collective vetted, modified and improved in its subsequent blog and Twitter interventions.

Wu Ming's commitment to generating, stimulating and fostering a dialogue with their followers is the starting point of my analysis. The newsletter was originally managed by Wu Ming 1 and webmaster Marco Dimitri. They were also responsible for experimenting with the technological affordances of the medium, but all Wu Ming members generally contributed articles on a diverse range of critical content: analysis of contemporary popular culture, literary debates or reviews, political insights, examinations of economic or legal policies, including

copy-left, and philosophical investigations among others (*Giap*, “Ch-ch-changes”). The members of the collective first and foremost selected content they were interested in and passionate about, and from which immediately emerges their ethico-political stance against neoliberalism.<sup>44</sup> Their articles underlined the affective bond between their authors and the matter under discussion, often reminding readers of a personal experience, research or critical reflection. *Giap* frequently collected Wu Ming members’ accounts of their political activism, projects, doubts and ideas. The tone of these texts was not imposing, but critical and propositional. What they presented was not simply content, information, knowledge, but a critical and affective approach to content that charged Wu Ming’s engagement in the dialogic dimension. The linguistic practices implemented in the newsletter were therefore primarily aimed at transforming the dialogic dimension engendered by this medium into a space of communication (i.e., sharing): readers were asked to share Wu Ming’s approach and critically and affectively elaborate on Wu Ming’s experiences and proposals, respond to them, and develop an affective yet critical bond to content within and without *Giap*.

Communication between Wu Ming and followers, however, was not unidirectional. Readers copiously e-mailed members of the collective and shared their reflections with them. The affective responses encouraged by the newsletter crystallized into written messages that Wu

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<sup>44</sup> In the first two years of the newsletter, its content focused on the anti-neoliberal movement evolution, the initiative of the *tute bianche* and Wu Ming’s involvement in this group. Debates about neoliberal economic policies, the idea of globalization and strategies of intervention were frequent. The collective followed the evolution of military conflicts (i.e., the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq) and deconstructed media narratives criminalizing immigrants and political activists. Between 2002 and 2003, *Giap* carried out a strenuous fight against new policies aimed at restricting copy-right laws and supported the implementation of copy-left—a support that characterizes the entire Wu Ming’s project. On *Giap*, Wu Ming constantly discussed environmental issues and promoted the implementation of eco-friendly practices in the publishing industry—for instance, the use of sustainably produced paper. Between 2006 and 2007, the collective built on Jenkin’s work and published reflections about intervention strategies in popular culture and against its privatization. *Giap* was also the medium through which the five authors explained their approach to collective writing practices and expressed their programmatic critique of hyper-individualized conceptions of the individual.

Ming welcomed as contributions to the newsletter's space of communication. In order to give voice to these responses, the online bulletin frequently reported e-mail exchanges between the members of the collective and the *giapsters*. Wu Ming dedicated entire issues of the newsletter to these exchanges<sup>45</sup> or comments, feedbacks, and short essays by their followers.<sup>46</sup> Subscribers' singular voices participated in the plural dialogic dimension of the newsletter, as did contributions from different associations, cultural activists and intellectuals close to the collective.

However, Wu Ming's selection of *giapsters*' contributions conditioned the plurivocal dialogue enacted by the newsletter. Their selection criteria were both quantitative—not all subscribers' messages could be included in the issues—and qualitative: “quando numerose persone pongono la stessa questione, o anche una sola persona pone una questione in termini interessanti, o comunque riteniamo un messaggio emblematico, allora includiamo la risposta in un numero di *Giap*” (*Giap*, “Partigiani”). Selection norms were not based on *who* spoke but on the value of their message, i.e., the affective and critical charge of *what* was said. In order to stress the importance of content, rather than author, *giapsters*' contributions were published anonymously or, more often, only accompanied by the contributor's first name or nickname, depending on how she signed her email. The singularity of the *giapster*'s dialogic agency was therefore acknowledged, but her contribution counted as a self-positioning act shared in a communication space where participants must take a stance and respond.

Wu Ming and followers' affective and linguistic participation practices would be unable to engender such a space of communication without the support of technology. Their dialogic

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<sup>45</sup> Here I am referring to the following *Giap* issues “Dibattito”; “Prosegue”; “Ancora sulla”; “Il soldato”; “Postille”; “Note”; “No teneis”; “Futuro.”

<sup>46</sup> See these *Giap* issues: “Opinioni”; “Ancora opinioni”; “Genova: una narrazione corale”; “Feedback”; “Speciale F15.”

exchanges were afforded by technological devices and enacted by a sequence of (non)human actions—point that the analysis of the issue “Genova: una narrazione corale” in Chapter 2 also discussed. The technological affordances of email networks allowed Wu Ming to reach their twelve thousand subscribers and receive their contributions, opinions and comments. Texts published in the newsletter resulted from affective forces that originated in their authors’ plural subjectivity, crystallized in language, became a set of electronic impulses, were codified in binary sequences of 0 and 1, and finally reappeared on screens as language. An ontological point deserves to be raised here: the newsletter was, first and foremost, a machinic assemblage enacted by the entanglement of Wu Ming, their followers and contemporary communication infrastructures. Without this entanglement, it would not exist.

Moreover, as a medium, the newsletter had specific technological affordances that affected subscribers’ interaction with the text. Hyperlinks connected the titles of contributions in the content list to the actual article, a common feature of *Giap* issues. This structured readers’ encounter with the text, which could be navigated linearly or transversally. Then, as Wu Ming’s transmedia activism became more ramified, *Giap* contained more and more links to other websites and sources driving further and increasing interactivity of the online reading experience. This increase does not necessarily mean a higher degree of participation by the reader (Jenkins, *Convergence* 133). However, it indicates that the entanglement between the reader’s human agency and the technological affordances of the medium (i.e., the links) enacted participation in the dialogic dimension. Links extended the boundaries of the space of communication to other websites, platforms and media. They made the newsletter machinic assemblage more ramified and even gave the user access to content that Wu Ming produced in offline interventions and published on their website (i.e., audio recordings of their conferences,

interviews, performances). The newsletter's communication space was a machinic assemblage where content sharing and circulation required several forms of negotiation between human user and nonhuman technological affordances.

Nevertheless, the political mobilization of this machinic assemblage in a post-anthropocentric direction was yet to be accomplished. The most problematic aspects that prevented this accomplishment were (a) the "Wu Ming-centrism" of the assemblage; (b) the scarce possibility for singularities participating in the assemblage to establish further connections with other singularities; and (c) linguistic forms of participation predominating over the material. Wu Ming's significant agency in creating a machinic and plurivocal space of communication cannot be concealed: in order to participate in constructing this space, *giapsters* had to send contributions to the members of the collective. *Giapsters'* modalities of participation were ultimately determined by Wu Ming and their selection. This touched even the possibility for them to participate in the newsletter communication space. The technological affordances allowing Wu Ming to create such a space did not foster unmediated or unfiltered interactions between *giapsters* within this space; all passed by the collective's email account. As a result, the space of communication did not actually articulate itself as a network or a ramified assemblage, but rather as a series of arrows all pointing at the same centre (i.e., Wu Ming) and from this centre going back to its origins (e.g., the subscribers).

A counterpoint to this argument may be that, in order to share and participate in the space of communication, *giapsters* did not necessarily need to crystallize their affective responses in linguistic contributions. Indeed, that is true. If I read the content of the newsletter, made it mine and "responded" to it by taking on particular actions, somehow, I would share and elaborate the ethico-political charge that characterized it. Yet, how did the newsletter propose to connect this

personal elaboration with those of other singularities? The formulation of linguistic contributions (i.e., sending an email and hoping that the text would be published) was the only way followers could share their opinion with twelve thousand other subscribers and possibly bring about this connection. This connection could also occur offline—as the Genoa G8 political demonstration showed. However, the language of the newsletter could only partially account for the complex (non)human entanglements of embodied and affective forms of participation. What was missing, in other words, or rather what the technological affordances of the newsletter could not allow to create, was an account of those affective (non)human bonds that linguistic expressions cannot possibly crystallize.

Wu Ming's experiments with the technological affordances of the newsletter were only a preliminary, explorative, and ultimately insufficient step toward the mobilization of machinic assemblages. The structure of the newsletter's communication space ultimately reduced exchange possibilities between participants and lacked the complexity required for challenging capillary forms of neoliberal enslavement. In order to deal with this complexity, Wu Ming experimented with technological affordances of other media (i.e., blogs and social networks) that offered much more interactive and entangled participation experiences.

#### 4.3.2. *Giap*: The Blog

Though Wu Ming's experiments with the technological affordances of alternative media began earlier, they started the blog, named *Giap* after the newsletter, only in 2010. While Wu Ming were still managing the newsletter, they set up different websites or thematic blogs dedicated to specific works, such as the film *Lavorare con lentezza* (2004) and the novels *Manituana* (2007) and *Altai* (2009). These new websites dramatically increased the transmedia



extension of the collective's activism. This extension multiplied and diversified points of contact between followers and the members of the collective and, unlike the newsletter, allowed followers to explore reciprocal interaction forms. The collective's experiments carried out through these different platforms were instrumental for understanding the potential of technological affordances of blogs, potential the *Giap* platform developed in its full significance. What *we* now must understand is whether increased interaction opportunities afforded by the blog decentred Wu Ming's agency, incremented the complexity of the machinic space of communication and were able to bring about a more synergistic entanglement between linguistic and material sharing practices.

In line with the newsletter, the linguistic practices Wu Ming implemented on the blog aimed at stimulating a critical understanding of the current system of power relations and fostering affective responses by those who shared in this new space of communication. Let us take the 2011 most commented blog posts as a study sample. These posts called for a cooperative challenging of mainstream narratives about socio-political, economic and cultural issues.<sup>47</sup> They unveiled practices of commodification of digital products, analysed the tension between subjugating and liberating practices on online networks and also revealed forms of workers' exploitation in companies that produce and distribute digital tools. These and other blog posts dealt with neoliberal practices of exploitation of people and the environment to stimulate readers' cognitive and affective reactions.

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<sup>47</sup> The blog post titles are the following (in chronological order): "Da Venezia partono i roghi di libri. Vogliamo fare qualcosa?"; "Quadratura dei cerchi concentrici – #nogelmini #bookbloc #demo2010"; "#Nucleare: ce tocca shit. Tanta e radioattiva"; "Abbandonare le illusioni su Bologna, immaginare un nuovo tempo"; "Nervi #saldi in Val di Sherwood: cronaca di una giornata #noTAV"; "Si balla! (L'inizio del crack, quello vero)"; "Feticismo della merce digitale e sfruttamento nascosto: i casi Amazon e Apple"; "Internet, censure vere e finte, umori forcaioli e... quella sfigata di Anna Frank"; "Qui la diretta della manifestazione di Roma #15o #15ott #15oct"; "Il professore, il barone e i bari. Il caso #Tolkien e le strategie interpretative della destra."

Unlike the newsletter, the technological affordances of the blog allowed *giapsters* to directly respond to this content by posting comments. *Giapsters* engaged with the content of these posts, criticized their arguments or added personal accounts contributing to the cooperative construction of a collective experience of knowledge sharing. On average, comments were one or two paragraphs long. Yet, more structured interventions that drew on alternative sources and so produced further knowledge about the topic were frequent. The interaction between the participants in the discussion, Wu Ming members included, was lively and at times vehement, heated, intense.<sup>48</sup> The design of the comment sections on *Giap* allowed commenters to directly reply to distinct messages in the list, multiplying opportunities for parallel discussions and engendering reciprocal challenges to established assumptions.<sup>49</sup> The point of *Giap* debates was not to reduce different standpoints to a homogenous position or impose particular views, but to acknowledge the existence of constructive conflict. The belief in the possibility for different standpoints and opinions to, etymologically speaking, confront and hit each other, created a

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<sup>48</sup> Wu Ming members individually intervene in the discussion, as they did in the newsletter. The members of the collective critically engage with negative feedback and observations, build on commenters' contributions, remind them of staying on topic or also criticize the superficial level of some comments. This is an example from an exchange between Valter Binaghi and Wu Ming 1 from June 26, 2011 in the comment section of the "Napoli è la Grecia che già siamo (Una guerra civile per gli anni Dieci)" blog post written by Luca. Binaghi writes "'Bisogna avere il coraggio di affermare che è la strategia del debito a dover essere messa in discussione. Che non sta scritto da nessuna parte che le banche non possano fallire, mentre cittadini e imprese e amministrazioni si e andare in malora.' Aggiungiamoci il presidio popolare dell'ambiente e delle risorse naturali, e su una cosa come questa si può costruire una politica per i prossimi dieci anni, che ci liberi dalle ormai ridicole e decrepite categorie 'conservazione-progresso,' 'destra-sinistra.' E' quello che i ventenni di oggi chiedono, e che i referendum hanno realmente manifestato." Wu Ming 1's reply reads "Valter, scusami, ma lo trovo davvero un commento povero e – pur nella sua brevità – pieno di luoghi comuni. Sinceramente, di tutte le possibili letture dell'esito referendario, quella che 'i ventenni' (come se fossero tutti uguali ed esprimessero una volontà generale, e come se il voto fosse stato faccenda esclusivamente giovanile) avrebbero chiesto a gran voce 'Né conservazione, né progresso! Né destra, né sinistra!' mi sembra la più balzana. E devo dire che 'sta retorica del 'né destra né sinistra' mi riesce sempre più indigeribile, la trovo sempre più vacua e pernicioso."

<sup>49</sup> The comment sections on *Giap* were originally organized in a unique feed. In order to address each other in this feed, participants added @ plus the nickname of the addressed person at the beginning of their text. This form of address has progressively decreased, although *giapsters* still use it to refer to specific comments to which they are not directly replying.

hybrid experience of dialogue and exchange that each singular voice and perspective contributed to enact.

The plurality of the comments engendered a space of communication much more complex than the newsletter one. These comments did not have to go through Wu Ming's email account, but rather appeared on the blog post webpage. The page, and by extension the blog, became a communication space where each act of self-positioning and response was immediately shared not only with members of the collective, but with all readers. This dynamic later evolved into frequent blog post publications by *giapsters*, decentring Wu Ming members' agency and showcasing the ongoing confrontation and exchange process between discussion participants. As *giapsters* increasingly entered in contact with each other, the complexity of the space of communication grew, thereby heightening their degree of contribution to its enactment above that in the newsletter. Wu Ming no longer completely controlled the discussion angle. Rather, it articulated itself as the conversation unfolded, with all the risks of promoting discursive practices inconsistent with the collective construction of a shared dialogic dimension (trolling, egotistic forms of self-promotion or rage, advertising messages and the like).

In order to avert a degeneration of the conversation in the blog, Wu Ming exploited the technological affordances of the medium and created filters that prevented trolls from joining the discussion. *Giap*, hosted by a WordPress platform, allowed only comments by registered users. After registration, each user's first comment had to be reviewed by a moderator, who assessed the consistency of the comment and contribution to the discussion. While useless expressions of scorn were blocked, thoughtful reflections, useful information, questions and responses were welcome. These needed to be longer than fifty characters—a minimum length that “serve a evitare commenti tipo: ‘;-)’ ‘LOL’ ‘Straquoto’ che aggiungono solo ridondanza e non servono a

una minchia” (Wu Ming 1, Comment, July 2, 2012). Comments shorter than fifty characters were not simply blocked but generated an automatic reply to the contributor asking for more thorough engagement in the conversation: “Uhm... il tuo commento è troppo breve. C’è un’alta probabilità che sia totalmente privo di senso. Sforzati un poco di più, grazie.” Moreover, comments on the longest and most thoughtful posts were not allowed until seventy-two hours after publication. As Wu Ming explain at the end of the blogposts where this stop is activated, “i commenti...saranno attivati 72 ore dopo la pubblicazione, per consentire una lettura ragionata e, nel caso, interventi meditati (ma soprattutto, pertinenti).”

Did these filters and blocks limit contributors’ participation in the common construction of the dialogic dimension? Did they reinstate Wu Ming’s agency at the centre of the space of communication? As we saw in the interaction among Aurora bar regulars in 54, the *Giap* blog’s dialogic dimension followed specific rules. Enacted by the technological affordances of the blog, these rules embodied limitations to the contributors’ agency that purposely resisted the propagation of “negatively marked online behaviours” (Hardaker 493): the programmatic disruption of conversations by computational or human trolls; cyberbullying or cyberstalking; the intrusive presence of messages that exploit the comment for advertising private initiatives; the compulsion to reply impulsively to blogposts whose writing required a great amount of time. The blog’s technological affordances constrained contributors’ actions. The aim was to hinder behaviours that may obtrude self-positioning and response dynamics on which the construction of the dialogic dimension relied. Filters limited specific practices in order to encourage users to develop a qualitatively different kind of agential participation. This demanded critical reflection, personal elaboration, affective involvement and engagement with other perspectives. In continuity with but also as an evolution of Wu Ming’s management of the newsletter, their

experimentation with the technological affordances of the blog did not reinstate the centrality of their agency, but rather operated a selection of participation practices ultimately meant to enact a particular form of relationality.

The modalities of enactment of this relationality constitute Wu Ming's most striking progress from the newsletter to the blog. On the one hand, newsletter technological affordances were a mere ontological support for the existence of its communication space. They only partially affected reading experience through hyperlinks and links. On the other hand, blog technological devices and tools were used to both shape user participation and foster reflection upon the dynamic of personal participation. Technological filters made the user reflect on her contribution as part of a collective effort with a clear goal: developing sustainable sharing and communication practices. Filters indirectly asked the commenter to join this collective effort and contribute content that could help participants reach this goal. The encounter with the filters was an experience that made the commenter consider her responsibility for the outcome of the operation. This shaped the commenting act into an ethico-political reflection upon the relationship between the commenter's singularity and the plural communication space she wanted to join. The relationality the filters engendered valued each contribution in relation to a plural whole, one where blog technological affordances and their nonhuman agencies participated in laying the ground for the development of a self-aware approach to collective collaboration. This (non)human relationality ultimately criticized individualistic approaches to political engagement and achieved a level of entanglement between human and nonhuman agencies that the newsletter could not enact.

Nevertheless, while Wu Ming's mobilization of the machinic assemblage of the blog decentred their agency and produced a more complex machinic entanglement, we must note that

*giapsters'* privileged form of participation was still fundamentally logocentric. On *Giap*, Wu Ming and their followers shared knowledge, affects and experiences. These crystallized in linguistic forms of expression that did not account for embodied forms of actualization of different and not-verbalized affects. The impact of the seventy-two-hour stop to comments on the commenter's temporal experience is the only example that seems to follow a synergy between linguistic and embodied sharing practices. The sixth section of this chapter will return to the importance of this stop. For now, we must understand that the goal of this stop is to break fast-paced contempt consumption practices and slow down commenting. The reader, in other words, is asked to dwell in her affective response to the text and linger on the process of actualization of this response in the language of the comment. The stop gestures towards a form of affective involvement in a collective effort not necessarily verbalized. As commenters, we share a break in our life rhythms and somehow converge on a common need to slow down. The break represents an invitation to think of the temporal dimension of our acts and change how we (i.e., our body, habits, affects, feelings) relate to time. By slowing down the act of writing, the stop encourages commenters to explore the pre-discursive dimension where their responses to content are yet to become linguistic expressions.

The seventy-two-hour stop unveils an interesting direction in Wu Ming's political praxis and seems to finally problematize the predominance of logocentric intervention practices. This interesting example, however, does not compensate for the fact that both reading and writing, principal forms of participation offered by the blog communication space, are practices inevitably bound to language.

#### 4.3.3. From *Giap* to Twitter and Beyond

The communication space engendered by Wu Ming and their followers on *Giap* crossed the boundaries of the blog and extended in a transmedia dimension. Wu Ming expanded their project to take advantage of the technological affordances of different media, create more ramified networks and bring about diverse sets of sharing practices. Each medium of this transmedia network allowed them to create synergies between multifaceted intervention practices and test multiple machinic mobilization strategies. The most interesting and experimental approach in this regard emerges from the relationship between the *Giap* blog and the Twitter account of the collective. Analysing this relationship will perhaps uncover whether and how Wu Ming's machinic interventions were able to overcome their logocentric flaws.

*Giap* and Wu Ming's Twitter account were connected from their very creation. The blog home page hosted a link to Wu Ming's account, where any Twitter member could follow their activity. Moreover, the blog's technological affordances allowed Wu Ming to connect the discussions on *Giap* with their Twitter feed, where some comments appeared periodically as tweets. The WordPress platform supporting the blog assigned a permanent link to each comment that could be embedded in a tweet. This tweet carried the text of the comment, which in turn led back to the blog post page where it emerged originally. The feedback loop between the blog and Twitter opened debates to a network of unpredictable interactions and contributions that potentially enriched the confrontation between different perspectives and their participation in the dialogic space of communication.

However, the technological affordances that distinguished *Giap* and Twitter did not necessarily engender a synergistic entanglement between the two platforms. On the one hand, Twitter was a powerful platform that granted *Giap* content visibility and diversified the debate.

On the other hand, the limit of one hundred forty characters did not allow the user to articulate opinions and reflections as structured and complex as on *Giap*. As Wu Ming argued in a blog post on the problematic blog-Twitter interaction (“Alcuni appunti disordinati sulla twittersfera italiana”) the short length of tweets pushed one to creatively synthesize their point. However, the forms of understatement a tweet required often caused misunderstandings and the need to spend some time explaining the actual meaning of the message. Moreover, the absence of technical filters the *Giap* design afforded on Twitter jeopardized collective debates. These were too often compromised by flaming (i.e., violent and offensive over-reactions (Hardaker 502)) and trolling. In the aforementioned blog post, published at the end of 2011, the collective reflected on these drawbacks and stated that their praxis on Twitter would change. They would no longer use this platform for producing content or articulating complex arguments, but as a relay, a powerful tool for circulating content and information. For Wu Ming, Twitter became a space for sharing links that bring to other platforms—not only *Giap*—where sustainable debates were possible, “perché discutere *su* Twitter è impossibile, mentre proporre discussioni abbiamo visto che funziona” (Wu Ming, “Alcuni”).

From the perspective of my cartography, the technological affordances of Twitter seem to problematize modalities of implementation of linguistic practices the newsletter and blog promoted. The design of the medium (i.e., the limit of one hundred forty characters) and its tools (i.e., hashtags, references, retweets, following) impacted Wu Ming’s content production and urged them to find new linguistic strategies and approaches. As their reflections suggest, this approach did not focus on the capacity of language to produce content, crystallize affects and stimulate critical reflection, as in the examples of the newsletter and blog. The approach rather centred upon its capacity to produce relations grounded in the synergistic entanglement of



linguistic expressions and the nonhuman agencies of the platform. Hashtags and references, for instance, are specifically designed for producing connections between the messages that incorporate them, while links are instrumental to the sharing of content produced elsewhere. Unlike other media, Twitter allowed Wu Ming to dramatically multiply and disseminate points of entry to sustainable spaces of communication like *Giap* and therefore fostered the circulation of its critical content.

While the blog's communication space benefited from its synergy with Twitter, it is not clear how the increased relational potential of this platform can override the logocentric impasse of participation on *Giap*. If we multiply access opportunities to *Giap*, we only increment its level of participation, but do not change it. The issue at stake is therefore the same: what online technological affordances would allow Wu Ming to mobilize affective forces and energies embodied by (non)human offline entanglements. Comments by *giapster* [tomm\_zan],<sup>50</sup> who participated in the discussion about the aforementioned blogpost, and a review of the theoretical debate concerning Twitter technological affordances, will help go beyond this impasse. As [tomm\_zan] argues, the synergy between *Giap* and Twitter produced the most effective results when the two media were used to coordinate actions and foster the mobilization of offline political initiatives. The street demonstrations organized in Rome on October 15, 2011 as part of the international mobilization against neoliberal economic policies named "Occupy the world" are an example. Writing the blog post "Qui la diretta della manifestazione di Roma #15o #15ott #15oct," Wu Ming circulated information about the hashtags used on Twitter to coordinate the offline protest. They also provided details about other sources and forms of support—radio stations, legal helplines, news feeds and Twitter threads—specifically dedicated to the offline

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<sup>50</sup> In this study, I will embed names in squared brackets when they are used as nicknames on Wu Ming's blog or Twitter. The nickname may or may not correspond to the actual name of the contributor.

demonstration. [Tomm\_zan]'s comment interestingly echoes media scholars' analyses of Twitter use in political events, as during the upheavals of the so-called Arab Spring or in coordinating the Occupy Wall Street movement. According to Henry Jenkins, Twitter undermines the constraints that authoritative governments impose on news circulation by fostering transnational flows of information ("Twitter Revolutions?"). These flows, as other scholars argue, encourage grassroots composition of counter-narratives that challenge mainstream media and help users hold media stakeholders accountable for the fake stories they produce.<sup>51</sup>

However, the positive story about technological affordances needs to be counterbalanced by careful consideration of faults and limitations. Media scholars have also warned against the delusive character of these forms of empowerment promoted by platforms like Twitter. When confined to the online dimension, they can give birth to ineffective practices of "slacktivism" or "clicktivism" (Morozov, "The Brave"; Halupka 115), or engender more easily monitored, censurable and repressible forms of protest (Fuchs, "Web"; Morozov, "The Net"). Studies investigating the relationship between online and offline forms of participation demonstrate that, in order for the former to bring about consistent political transformations, they must connect with offline political actions, organizations, and embodied experiences.<sup>52</sup> For this study, then, it becomes crucial to investigate the relationship between the online and offline extensions of Wu Ming's activism. More specifically, it is important to study how the collective was able to exploit the relationship between Twitter, as "cronaca dell'istante" (tomm\_zan), and other media spaces

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<sup>51</sup> For the observations carried out in this paragraph, see the following sources: Harlow and Johnson, "Overthrowing the Protest Paradigm? How The New York Times, Global Voices and Twitter Covered the Egyptian Revolution"; Jackson and Brooke, "Hijacking #Mynypd: Social Media Dissent and Networked Counterpublics."; and Howard, *Pax Technica: How the Internet of Things May Set Us Free or Lock Us Up*.

<sup>52</sup> See, in particular, Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*; Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*; Murthy, *Twitter: Social Communication in the Twitter Age*; and Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, into the Streets! Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*.

for critical reflection to successfully coordinate and organize political initiatives in the streets. The next two sections, therefore, will study two cases: Wu Ming's creative use of hashtags for joining online and offline forms of protest (section 4.4), and the collective's reliance on online and offline experiences to explore and implement alternative life rhythms and temporalities (section 4.5).

#### 4.4. *Tenere il culo in strada* 2.0: the #Renziscappa Campaign

According to Lance W. Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, the synergistic implementation of Twitter hashtags and offline political practices by movements like People First or 15 Mayo exemplifies grassroots forms of organization, an alternative to traditional institutions such as parties or unions. For the two scholars, these experimental practices of political organization, which are able to channel plural forms of indignation and critique, mark the passage from established examples of "collective action" to more ductile enactments of "connective action" (Bennett and Segerberg 743). While the former exploit media for broadcasting top-down messages and unifying plural individual claims, connective actions benefit from online communication networks to make the plurality of these agencies participate in the expression, enactment and sharing of their personal reasons for protesting (Bennett and Segerberg 744). Hashtags are the technical tool that, on Twitter, orchestrates singular and plural contributions to connective actions (Segerberg and Bennett 203). This tool makes it possible to index keywords or topics and improve their searchability (Twitter Help Center). This way, hashtags create unpredictable connections across the protest space, linking tweets from different participants and hindering any centralized control of shared messages (Segerberg and Bennett 204).

However, both authors acknowledge that political projects organized according to the logic of connective action risk losing coherence and running out of control (Segerberg and Bennett 207). For Malcolm Gladwell, this logic can only bring about “weak ties” that do not evolve in strong relationships and produce smaller changes than traditional forms of “high-risk” activism. As he argues in an article published on the *New Yorker* website, “where activists were once defined by their causes, they are now defined by their tools” and “seem to have forgotten what activism is.” How are these weak-ties networks of communication supposed to formulate strategies and define goals? Gladwell argues that only strong and lasting ties can stand violent repression and ultimately engender systemic changes, as Civil Rights Movements did in the 1960s.

The organization of political actions across the online and offline dimensions and the production of alternative political subjectivities therefore face two major challenges. First, to design offline political initiatives synergistically entangled with online technological affordances that empower the former, give these initiatives visibility and help participants make sense of both the plurality of claims they embody and the common goals, affects, and values they share. Secondly, to articulate relational political subjectivities that engender small but constant changes through the potential of networked and flexible “weak ties.” Facing this challenge implies focusing on organizing molecular networked initiatives aimed at enacting long-term accomplishments, instead of expecting abrupt top-down revolutionary changes. This section will show how Wu Ming addressed these two challenges by examining how the members of the collective and followers used the #Renziscappa hashtag. This particular intervention spanned multiple media—Twitter, *Giap* and two maps—and strategically experimented with the technological affordances of each for different purposes. Three subsections will present these

experiments and their contribution to the (successful, unsuccessful?) mobilization of this transmedia network.

#### 4.4.1. Tracking, Sharing, Organising: The Uses of the Hashtag

Wu Ming launched the hashtag campaign on both Twitter and *Giap* on November 4, 2014. The purpose of this campaign was to report, track down and follow any episode of offline contestation against the Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, nominated on February 22, 2014 as political leader of the Italian *Partito Democratico* (PD). Renzi promoted his leadership by constructing a narrative portraying him as a man of the people, the only one able to interpret Italians' problems, embody their pragmatism, and free them from a long-standing political stagnation. This narrative relied on sensationalist slogans like “la mia scorta è la gente” (Cazzullo) or “questa è la volta buona,” cheap language, and trite considerations (Raimo, “La benedetta”). As Sofia Ventura argues in *Renzi & Co*, Renzi's narrative and communicative approach had two major goals: simultaneously convey the exceptionality of Renzi's figure and his place in the everyday life of Italian people (9).

Renzi and his entourage promoted this story in the Italian media environment, controlling messages that mainstream newspapers, popular magazines, television channels and social media spread. The leader and his collaborators were particularly concerned with how Twitter could expand the reach of the narrative, also aimed at underlining interconnections between the leader's personal experience, political skills and government's agenda (Ventura 155). The Prime Minister's goal was to revolutionize bureaucracy, labor laws, school and legislative procedures. His government introduced neoliberal policies that eased decision-making practices; reduced supervision over their legitimacy; made jobs more flexible and precarious; transformed public

institutions into autonomous private-like firms; and aimed to centralize legislative power by reducing the agency of the Senate.<sup>53</sup>

However, Renzi's coordination of narrative construction, control of the media and structural reforms was essentially flawed. According to Ventura, his all-encompassing story was out of touch with the problematic real conditions of the country. Throughout 2014, Renzi increasingly disregarded these problems to preserve the main frame of the narrative, weakening his credibility and ultimately causing dissent around his figure. As two surveys show, Renzi's consensus peaked in June 2014 and decreased by more than 20% between June and December of the same year (Ventura 180).<sup>54</sup> On October 25, 2014, more than a million people took part in the demonstration the Italian main union (CGIL) organized in Rome against Renzi's labor reforms. This revealed his narrative was slowly but inexorably losing its grip on Italians. The unsuccessful results of the Constitutional referendum held on December 4, 2016 sealed the fate of Renzi's government. The leader resigned three days later.

Wu Ming's launch of the hashtag campaign #Renziscappa, which lasted from early November 2014 to December 2016, specifically aimed to reveal flaws in Renzi's narrative. The use of the hashtag initiated a grassroots action that slowly but surely inserted a crack in Renzi's control of mainstream media and unveiled the Prime Minister's avoidance of public confrontations as a defense strategy for preserving the integrity of his narrative. On Twitter, Wu Ming and their followers gathered information about several episodes between 2014 and 2016. Such episode included escapes from protesters in Treviso, Siracusa, Terni, Brescia, Vimercate;

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<sup>53</sup> Here I refer to the *Sblocca Italia* Law Decree, issued in 2014; the so-called Jobs Act, a set of law decrees issued between 2014 and 2015 that aimed to reform labor laws; the *Buona Scuola* school reform, designed in 2015 (law 107) and implemented in 2017; and the December 4, 2016 Constitutional referendum. Considerations made in this paragraph also draw on: Baldini and Renwick; Hanretty and Profeti; and Picot and Tassinari.

<sup>54</sup> According to the survey of the agency Demos, Renzi's consensus amounts to 74% in June 2014 and 50% in December 2014, while Ipsos reports slightly different figures, respectively 70% and 49%.

cancellations of visits where demonstrations had been organized in Turin, Val Susa, Bagnoli and Naples; and deployments of police forces to contain or charge demonstrators in Rome, Bologna, L'Aquila and Pisa.

In the early days of the campaign, and increasingly throughout 2015 and 2016, the use of the hashtag grew and evolved. As a hyperlink, #Renziscappa connected users with all the tweets that embedded it and, consequently, the people using the hashtag. On November 7, 2014, [AuraLuna] (@AuraLuna1) used a #Renziscappa “preventivo” to call people to participate in a street gathering in San Benedetto. Some days later, activists organizing the street demonstrations to be held in Bologna on November 14 and 15 used #Renziscappa to promote and coordinate the protest, as participants in the Pisa protest on April 29, 2016 did. In other words, #Renziscappa was not only used to report or track down past episodes, but also to organize and coordinate future demonstrations, as well as comment on escapes likely to take place. These implementations of #Renziscappa exploited its potential for articulating singular and plural forms of participation in each political action. The hashtag was key to performing these actions and establishing relations between users.

From a theoretical perspective, the technological affordances of hashtags have an interesting potential for forms of political mobilization and relationality. According to Zizi Papacharissi, the connections hashtags allow to generate affective entanglements between users, who, by sharing information, produce and enact a sense of belonging to a common endeavour (9–10). For Michele Zappavigna, hashtagging is an act of manifestation of one's singularity (Zappavigna 37) that immediately engenders a synergistic entanglement between singular performances and collective effort (Zappavigna 36–38; Papacharissi 28). Jenkins argues that participants in hashtag campaigns individually mark their presence (“The Message”) and carry

out a series of acts of self-positioning that, for Zappavigna, ultimately compose a shared narrative, the idea of being part of a common story (Zappavigna 38). These theoretical considerations help us illuminate the relational and political potential of the #Renziscappa hashtag. Sharing details and information about Renzi's escapes, #Renziscappa users exploited the technological affordances of the online tool and fostered the creation of a sense of belonging. Each singular act of self-positioning situated users in a shared effort to undermine Renzi's mainstream story. This effort was human and nonhuman, as the connections in which the whole operation was grounded were inevitably bound to the synergistic entanglement of human action and hashtag technological affordances. Each tweet with the hashtag #Renziscappa embodied the collaborative performance of singular human and nonhuman agencies that cooperated to deconstruct the narrative that Renzi, his collaborators and mainstream media were building.

However, the analysis of #Renziscappa occurrences between 2014 and 2016 (more than 8000)<sup>55</sup> reveals that this online cooperation was flawed and fragile. The campaign was dramatically hit by trolling practices and deliberate appropriations of the hashtag by political parties outside what we may call the Wu Ming community—for instance, *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S). A huge quantity of Twitter users attacked, insulted and personally scorned the Prime Minister without sharing any information about his escapes or contributing in any way to demonstration organization. Moreover, M5S representatives repetitively exploited #Renziscappa for propagandistic purposes when it became a popular trend on Twitter, particularly in mid-November 2014, on April 29, 2016 and in November 2016. The M5S mocked Renzi and his party, evidently using the popularity of the hashtag for increasing their consensus.

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<sup>55</sup> In order to estimate the total amount of tweets incorporating the hashtag, I downloaded data on April 10, 2019 using an open-source software. According to download results, these tweets amount to 8305. However, since Twitter does not save and store all tweets published in the past, the actual number of messages incorporating the hashtag is likely to be higher. My estimate only reflects the total amount of tweets available on that day. This amount may change in time.



For example, on April 29, while the police were charging demonstrators in Pisa and the hashtag went viral, the M5S blog published the article “*Pensioni al collasso, #Renziscappa*” (M5S Senato). The article attacked Renzi’s welfare system policies and denounced retired people’s poor economic conditions. Its text made stereotypical and trite claims unrelated to the situation of the street protest or the spirit of the #Renziscappa campaign (one example is: “i pensionati sono sotto attacco da diversi anni” (M5S Senato)). Moreover, on the same day, a video of an interview with M5S MPs Michele Dell’Orco, who corroborated the content of the article and did not even mention the ongoing demonstrations, was published on YouTube and tagged with the hashtag #Renziscappa (M5S Parlamento). On Twitter, M5S trolls, like @collecolluso, slavishly shared the links to both these contents and obstructed participants’ communication in the offline protest. Tweeting about these forms of appropriation, Wu Ming argued that “certamente l’uso ‘improprio’ dell’hashtag ne ha esteso la diffusione, ma ne annacqua anche lo scopo” (WMF, April 29, 2016).

The exemplified trolling and flaming practices appropriated the hashtag, problematized its use and jeopardized the consistency of the #Renziscappa campaign. These practices attacked the Prime Minister personally, rather than presenting him as the agent of neoliberal power relations, policies and narratives. When trolling and flaming tweets addressed social issues at all, they did not analyse them as structural consequences of the neoliberal progressive dismantling of the welfare system, but simply blamed the Prime Minister’s inability to solve them. This revealed once again the propagandistic vein of these claims and further personalization of the attack. These forms of appropriation seem to reveal a flaw in the phrasing of the hashtag, which for the sake of synthesis metonymically targeted the name of the subject who flees (Renzi) without rendering the complexity of the neoliberal establishment that supported his power.

Moreover, as Wu Ming commented in a tweet on May 2, 2016, trolls turned the name of the hashtag #Renziscappa, which in Italian means “Renzi runs away,” into a triumphalist imperative ordering Renzi to flee. Wu Ming’s observation unveils a second flaw in the phrasing of the hashtag, which in Italian can be interpreted as both an indicative or imperative sentence and is therefore inherently ambiguous. Trolls exploited the discursive ambiguity of the hashtag and hijacked its use from offline grassroots protests and demonstrations, which the original meaning of the hashtag aimed to detect and support.

#### 4.4.2. A Space for Reflection: The Role of the Blog

The problematic evolution of the campaign on Twitter demonstrates the vulnerability of online activism unless consolidated and supported by different forms of intervention and organization. We have already noted that Wu Ming are aware of these dangers (e.g., the pessimist observations in “Alcuni appunti disordinati sulla twittersfera italiana”), and responded to them by not attempting to enclose the cooperative construction of the #Renziscappa narrative on Twitter, but rather by making it a transmedia operation that benefited from Twitter synergistic entanglement with *Giap*. Between 2014 and 2016 the collective dedicated three blog posts to the campaign. The first was published on the day of the launch. The second, written by Christian Raimo, appeared on July 31, 2015, in response to Renzi’s new tactics of defense, namely showing up unannounced or having police forces close down the locations of his visits. And the third dates to April 30, 2016, the day after the most dangerous troll attacks on the coherence of the campaign.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> In this paragraph I respectively refer to the blog posts “#Renziscappa. Note su ‘enzi come comunicatore e sullo stato del ‘enzismo’”; “#Renziscappa. Debolezza, fughe e paura del confronto di un premier che diceva ‘la mia scorta è la gente’” and “#Renziscappa, una storia italiana.”

The three blog posts consolidated the narrative of the campaign, encouraging Twitter and *Giap* followers to participate in transmedia processes of information sharing and discussion. In particular, the first post contained a selection of messages Wu Ming tweeted in the days before and during the launch, signaling the need for the campaign and its coordination to benefit from transmedia cooperative efforts and technological affordances. The blog provided the participants in the campaign with a space where the debate could develop critically. This space was meant for more thorough discussions and collectively planned long-term achievements regarding solutions to Renzi's tactics. Moreover, the blog technological affordances established a different rhythm for the debate. In [tomm\_zan]'s words, the dynamic confrontation between different perspectives slowed down, making one stop and try to understand the complexity of events unfolding too fast on Twitter.

Comments to the three posts engaged with insightful analyses of Italian politics, Renzi's policies, the contradictory position of the PD and the transformation of Italian leftist culture in the last thirty years. For *giapster* [girolamo] and many others throughout the debate about the first blog post, Renzi leadership was supported by an economic network of neoliberal powers using his figure and narrative to expand their control over political, social and economic relations. However, according to [maurovanetti], the CGIL demonstration represented a clear break and the end of Renzi's honeymoon with Italian civil society. Renzi's spell on the Italian people suddenly lost its force as it was "irreale, sganciato dalla condizione quotidiana di milioni di lavoratori, disoccupati, inoccupati, pensionati, giovani" (maurovanetti). Not all discussion participants acknowledged the weight of the offline demonstration on Renzi's loss of consensus. For [conques], it was important to fight Renzi's narrative also in the media environment, where the Prime Minister constructed his image of great communicator and object of spectacle. Wu

Ming 1 replied that the #Renziscappa campaign was launched precisely for that reason. The hashtag cornered Renzi's virtual figure making his claims and narrative increasingly unsustainable, while the "controcomitati di accoglienza" who demonstrated against Renzi actual presence in different cities physically embodied the sense of the hashtag and made its action effective in the offline dimension.

The lesson to be drawn from the #Renziscappa campaign is this: a positive outcome is conditional upon the creation of a synergistic entanglement between online transmedia processes of information sharing and offline embodied demonstrations. For an alternative narrative to be composed and acquire consistency, the transmedia presence of #Renziscappa on both Twitter and *Giap* had to link to offline struggles, their geographical distribution, and temporal evolution. This realization opened the way for further and creative intervention combining the online and offline dimension of the campaign. In a further debate comment, Wu Ming 1 developed the idea that campaign participants needed to visualize and make sense of the plural extension of protests on an interactive map. Helped by Wu Ming and their followers, who collected information reported on a spreadsheet shared on both Twitter and *Giap*, *giapster* [figuredisfondo] created two maps, one in November 2014 and the second (a story-map) in October 2015, which was constantly updated until the end of the campaign.

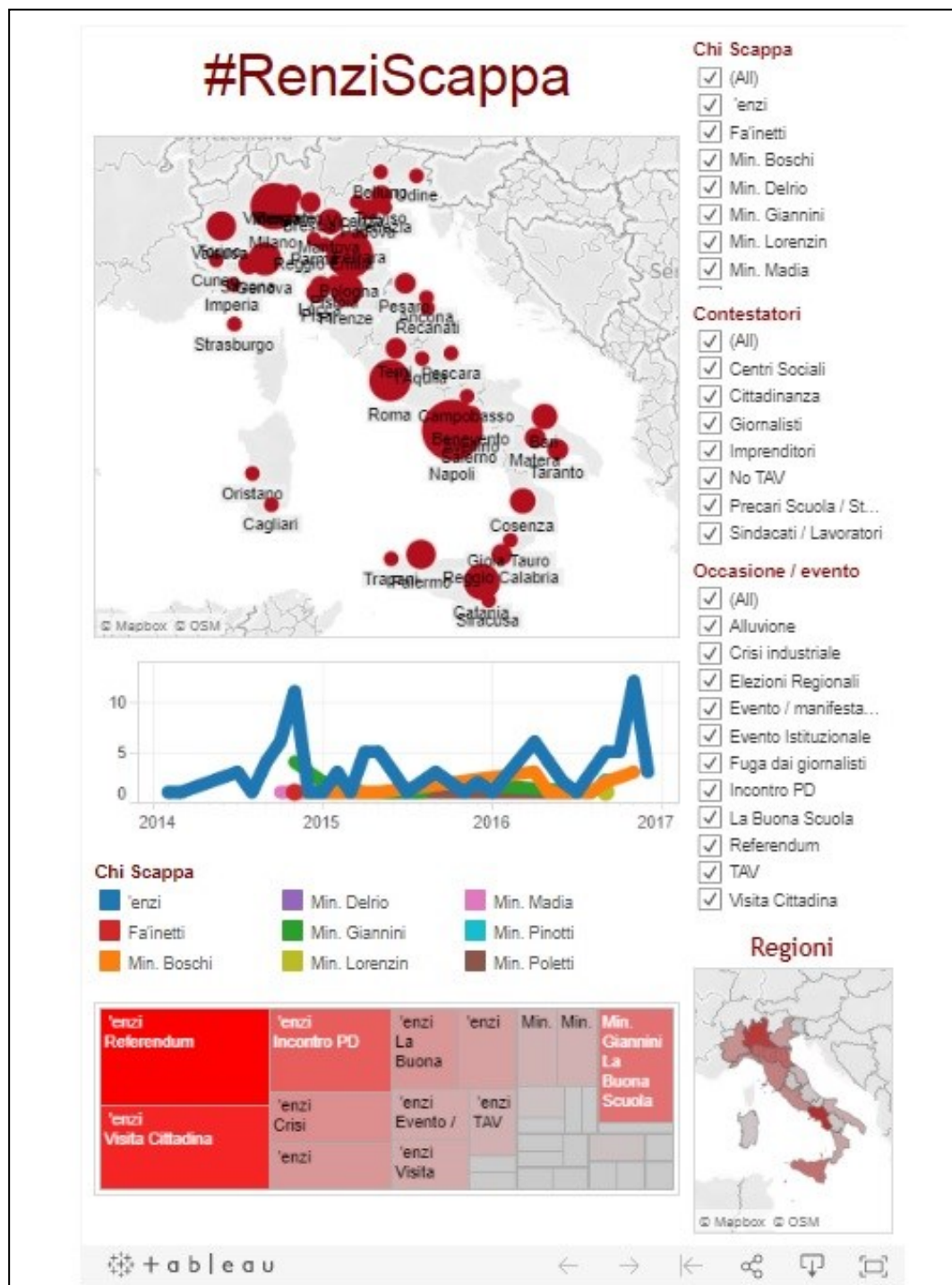


Fig. 6. #Renziscappa: the first map (light version)

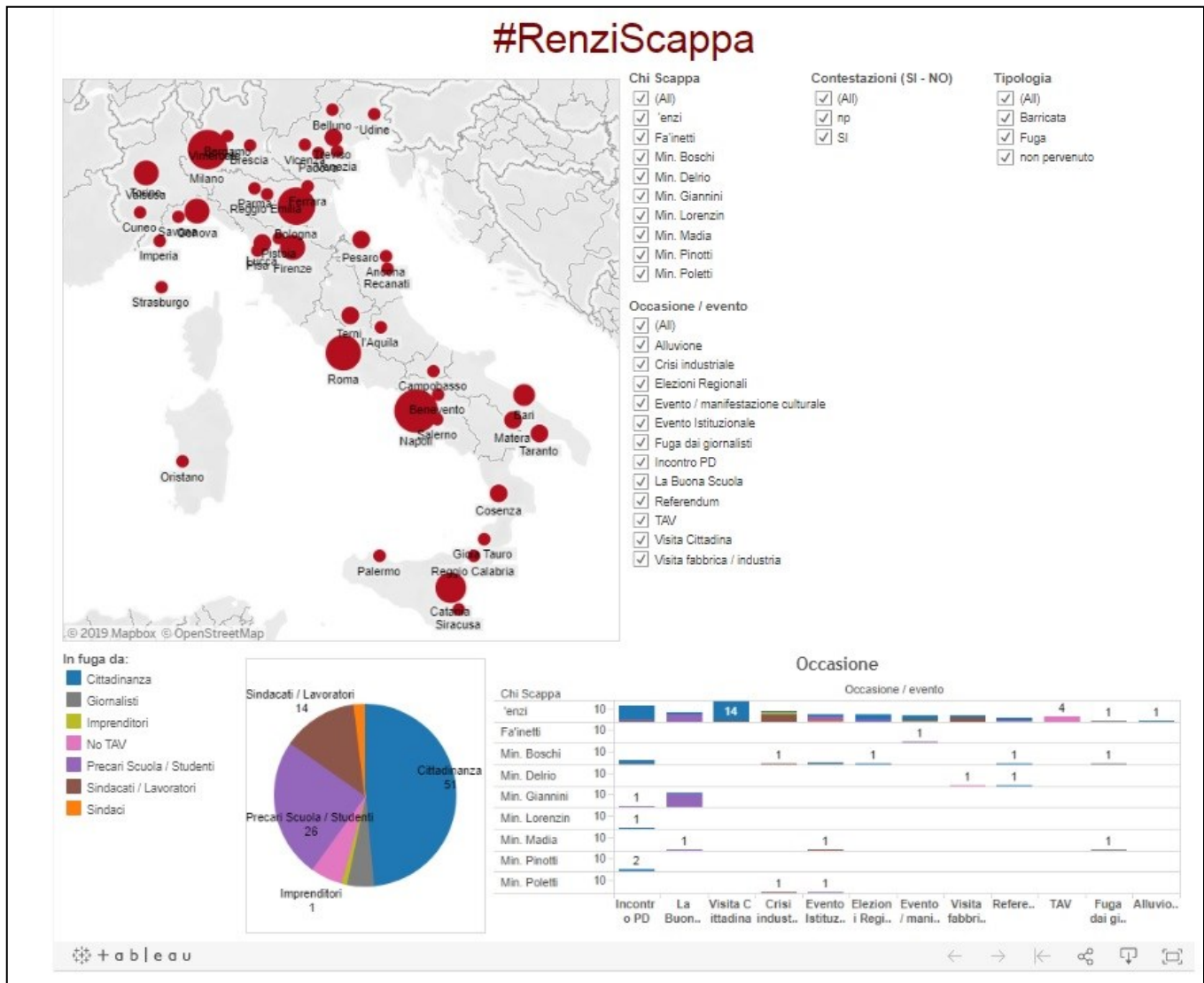


Fig. 7. #Renziscappa: the first map (full version)

#### 4.4.3 Visualizing the Campaign: The First Map

The first map, regularly updated and available in light (Figure 6) and full version (Figure 7), allowed the participants in the campaign to immediately see the geographic distribution of the protests across Italy. The map also allowed them to frame their participation into the construction of a narrative alternative to Renzi's. The light version was equipped with filters that (a) showed who was fleeing, be it Renzi, a minister or a collaborator; (b) gave information about the event;

(c) differentiated contestation practices; and (d) reported episodes of police repression. The map also embedded a temporal diagram that accounted for the quantitative trend of the escapes in the two years. In the full version, a pie chart displayed the socio-economic clusters of participants who made Renzi & co. flee: citizens, journalists, public school precarious workers, students, laborers, unions, No TAV activists, local mayors, entrepreneurs and journalists.

The visual assemblage of geographical, temporal and socio-economic data about the protest illustrated different local challenges to Renzi's discourse and transformed them into singular contributions to a collective effort. Providing viewers with information about the structural reform(s) targeted by the protesters, the map depersonalized attacks and focused on their rejection of neoliberal policies Renzi's government was implementing and his narrative embodied. The map, named after the #Renziscappa hashtag and shared on both *Giap* and Twitter as of November 12, 2014, made a brilliant contribution to connecting online processes of information sharing with offline practices of intervention.

The interactive map situated singular offline acts of self-positioning into the online dialogic dimension that extended throughout different media. As the map also accounted for the temporal evolution of these acts, it encouraged the viewer to look at the #Renziscappa campaign from both a synchronic and diachronic perspective. The singular episodes of protest were projected into a spatio-temporal event sequence that the participants in the campaign christened the #Renziscappa tour. The map therefore *told*, like a narrator, the campaign story and contributed to enacting it. The story drew the attention of newspapers like "Il Fatto Quotidiano" (Turrini) or journals like "Left" (Filippi), which respectively published the map on their website or in their paper edition. Moreover, mainstream journalist Lucia Annunziata wrote about the campaign on *The Huffington Post Italia*, acknowledging the distance between Renzi and large

sectors of the population. The map gave the campaign a renewed impetus, further developing a narrative voice alternative to the media the current government was controlling. This voice participated in the online space of communication, fostering the formation of a plural political subjectivity. Yet, to be effective, it needed echo in embodied forms of engagement in the street. As Wu Ming tweeted on November 13, 2014, “questa mappa viene da strade e piazze, e in strade e piazze va fatta vivere.” The narrative voice this map embodied needed offline performative materializations of its message. The voice did not simply speak through the map. It was also (and more importantly), part of a (non)human assemblage of enunciation carrying out acts of on/offline communication. As this assemblage spoke online through the map, it also spoke offline through the materializations of the hashtag on banners and walls. The pictures taken in Bologna (Figures 8 and 9) and Bari (Figure 10), show how #Renziscappa assumed material consistency and literally went into the streets, making online and offline dimensions communicate.



Fig. 8. #Renziscappa: a banner promoting the campaign (Bologna)





Fig. 9. #Renziscappa: a street banner (Bologna)



Fig. 10. #Renziscappa: a writing on a wall supporting the campaign (Bari)

The analysis of the #Renziscappa campaign has so far focused on how the technological affordances of the hashtag, the blog and the map contributed to its enactment. These media respectively allowed Wu Ming and the *giapsters* to share information and connect; reflect on and design new strategies; and visualize the evolution of the campaign. However, none of these media accounted for the full transmedia complexity of the campaign. The interactive map, for instance, owed its impact to a visual immediacy that neither Twitter nor *Giap* had. Nevertheless, the map did not make visible, tangible, clear the transmedia articulations of the #Renziscappa project. Also, and similarly to the other two online platforms, the map did not incorporate the material and affective forces that ran through the embodiments of the demonstrators, the objects they carried and the locations they occupied. In other words, neither the map, *Giap*, nor Twitter were able to account for the complex machinic assemblage of agencies that participated in the production of an alternative political subjectivity. The last campaign component left to discuss is the story-map designed by [figuredisfondo] in 2015. This map programmatically deals with this complexity and understanding it necessitates a further theoretical step developed in the next section.

#### 4.5. A Transmedia Assemblage of “Enunciation:” The Story-Map

How can one possibly create a largely sharable account of a political initiative that encompasses Twitter, *Giap*, and is also enacted by material (non)human entities in the street? The answer to this question is composite and requires a few considerations. One should exploit the technological affordances of networks and links to create a platform that can unite content created on different websites. Next, linguistic practices that crystallize participants’ affective involvement in the campaign on *Giap* and Twitter should be included. Immediate forms of

visualization that show the extension and chronological evolution of the campaign must be found. And, finally, affects that are not necessarily verbalized, but embodied and actualized by a plural set of (non)human material entities ought to be accounted for. The story-map constituted a complex machinic assemblage able to meet all these demands. It entangled different technological affordances in a single interactive story. In particular, by embedding videos of the protests, the story-map was able to produce a closer encounter between its user-reader-viewer and the embodied practices of interventions of the campaign. The centrality of the videos for the project of the story-map cannot be underestimated and calls for immediate recognition of the nonhuman agency of the camera as a core contribution to rendering the on/offline transmedia complexity of the campaign. In order to explain the full significance of this contribution and resulting shift (from the first map to the story-map), I will describe the story-map, return to Lazzarato's theory and Barad's ontology, and emphasize the importance of mobilizing machinic networks for producing an alternative political subjectivity.

The interactive story-map embedded tweets, texts, images and videos to compose a transmedia narration of the campaign, from the most recent episode (December 7, 2016) to early 2014. Its home page displayed a map of the Italian peninsula punctuated by tags and lines that link them all (Figure 11). Each tag corresponded to one stage of the #Renziscappa tour. In order to value the transmedia extension of the assemblage, the form of the tags was diversified according to the content format they linked to (videos, images, tweets). Clicking on the tags, the user navigated through different pages with more detailed information about each singular episode (date, time, location, social actors involved in the demonstration, tactics of repression) or links connecting the user to other contributions (newspaper articles, blog posts, tweets or further content). The user could then navigate backward through all the episodes or also click on a

specific one. Navigation permitted looking at them from both a synchronic perspective that acknowledged their singularity and a diachronic standpoint that framed them into a collective transmedia story. Each step of this story accounted for circumscribed political actions, which aimed to produce relatively small but constant political changes through the organization of capillary and connected initiatives.



Fig. 11. #Renziscappa: the story-map

The interaction between user and story-map produced indeed a narrative. This interaction enacted a story as the user navigated through the different pages. The narrator of this story is a (non)human assemblage, a composition of linguistic expressions, images, links, videos, data the user encountered and was entangled with. The complexity of this entanglement cannot be reduced to the encounter with a “voice,” as this narrator does not exactly “speak.” As we learned

from the analysis of Wu Ming's literary works, studying this composite "voice" as an act of enunciation would reduce the plurality of (non)human agencies that participate in the assemblage and their reciprocal entanglements. As in Wu Ming's literary works, the story-map conveyed the affective and material complexity of the entanglement between these agencies through perspective dynamics. These refer to the encounter between (non)human points of view, especially those of viewers and cameras recording videos. Unlike Wu Ming's texts, however, here the encounter is not mediated by linguistic forms of expression. The viewer was asked to see what the camera saw. The viewer, in other words, physically looked at the world from a point of view not necessarily or exclusively human and engaged in an encounter grounded in the materiality of the (non)human agencies that compose it.

Each video has singular features that differently enact this encounter. Recordings may start with Renzi's figure on a stage. But then, demonstrators' presence breaks into the frame as the camera either (a) slowly zooms out, distancing itself from the Prime Minister, and lets protesters' shouts intrude Renzi's discourse (Vista Agenzia Televisiva, "Il contestatore"; Alessandro Fiorani); or (b) abruptly cuts to a scene of nearby protests (Fanpage.it, "Napoli"); or (c) shoots stage surroundings from a high angle (MeridioNews). In other videos, cross-cutting alternatively shows Renzi on the stage and the protesters who were not allowed into the location where he was speaking. This visually and aurally enacts the contact with the people from which he was escaping (Fanpage.it, "Piaggio"). High-angle long shots are also used to account for the large turnouts of the demonstrations (Riscatto Pisa), as well as display the disposition of fences or police forces that forbid trespassing into delimited public areas (MeridioNews).

When the camera gets closer to demonstrators, it usually focuses on the space between the latter and the police (Vista Agenzia Televisiva, "Collettivi"). The camera lingers on these

scenes, where participants in parades or pickets walk, sing, dance or shout and policemen stand still or charge them (E655Caimano; Riscatto Pisa). Long takes convey the temporal evolution of the protest, while the camera dwells in the street as an entity that participates in its enactment as consistently as humans do. In a video shot in Naples by Local Team, the camera is on a sidewalk and looks at the protest from a side perspective. It shows the demonstrators on the left and the police on the right, while they clash and push against each other. The camera slowly pans left and right, concentrating on the porous boundary between the bodies of the former and the latter. Finally, it moves within the group of protesters, aligning with it. In other examples, when these groups move and one of the participants holds the camera, it oscillates as she walks, reproducing the rhythm of her steps (Vista Agenzia Televisiva, “Sostenitori”).

The camera and the demonstrator holding it are the synergistic ensemble that situated the story-map user *there*, into the street and among material embodiments, where the protest had its own rhythms and, as Lazzarato writes, “suspend[ed] time for a brief moment” (*Signs* 223). As the Italian philosopher argues in *Videofilosofia* building on Henry Bergson’s definition of time, matter is constituted by different durations, contractions and expansions of fluxes that engender the phenomena of the world and its entities (35–36). Phenomena and entities are temporal synthesis of these fluxes, pauses that coexist in a multiplicity of rhythms, movements, speeds and moments of rest. Strikes, revolts and the #Renziscappa protests were therefore actions that broke with codified temporalities imposed by the networks of machinic enslavement and engendered a different rhythm, from which alternative processes of subjectivation could stem.

For Lazzarato, cameras and new computational technologies are machines able to crystallize time and capture the contractions and expansions of fluxes that generate material and affective entanglements (*Videofilosofia* 18). This point cannot be stressed enough. The camera

and videos produced crystallizations of embodied affects that the newsletter, blog, and Twitter could not carry out being essentially bound to verbal language. This production compensated for the flaws of logocentric approaches to the mobilization of machinic assemblages. It made material street practices, with their rhythms and dynamics, participate in a process of subjectivation. Lazzarato argues that, as machinic forms of perception and investigation of the interpenetration of matter and time, cameras and computational technologies “sono dei vettori di soggettivazione meccanica, risultato di una ibridazione tra l’uomo e la macchina” (*Videofilosofia* 37). The encounter with the camera through the story-map fostered a subjectivation process grounded in a (non)human entanglement. As Lazzarato argues, these technologies “automatizzano le funzioni dell’intelletto e della percezione, permettono di interrogarsi sullo statuto di queste categorie e di far risaltare i limiti antropomorfici della loro concezione” (*Videofilosofia* 37). By incorporating the technological affordances of the camera (i.e., its agency), the story-map pointed at the ontological possibility of alternative life rhythms, relationalities and, ultimately, (non)human political subjectivities.

The user participated in enacting this subjectivity, partaking in the reproduction of the protests through the story-map, as viewer, reader and performative embodiment that potentially experienced the offline rhythm of the demonstrations crystallized by the camera. The technological affordances of the story-map and the content it embedded asked the viewer to spend a large amount of time reading articles, navigating through its pages and especially watching the videos. Although the viewer was not in physical contact with the demonstrators in the streets, the connection of her point of view with the eye of the camera broke into her life rhythm and entangled it with the crystallization of time contractions and expansions that the affective, material and discursive agencies in the street embodied. The connection between the



two points of view was an act of communication that introduced the viewer to the temporal dimension of a different (non)human praxis, from which alternative possible actions, behaviours and entanglements stemmed. The camera and the viewer, as Barad would say, were intra-acting, mutually entangled in the phenomenon contributing to engendering their (non)human subjectivity.

The story-map analysis uncovered a new strategy in Wu Ming's experiments with transmedia technological affordances. This one grounds the mobilization of machinic assemblages in temporal forms of participation. The story-map did not simply point at the common construction of a *space* of communication, but also to the co-enactment of a common experience that unfolds through *time* and has different rhythms. The temporal focus of this form of engagement echoes practices encountered on *Giap* (i.e., the seventy-two-hour stop to comments) and also in previous chapters (e.g., walking). These resonances reveal that Wu Ming have been increasingly reflecting upon the potential of temporal forms of participation. The dissemination of these "temporal" interventions, however, also suggests these reflections are still ongoing and in their experimental stage. Wu Ming are still exploring the new territory of "temporal participation" and this exploration is yet to engender a sustained and structured intervention. This promising but yet to be defined trajectory of their activism is difficult to map and fully develop in my cartography. Therefore, I will conclude this chapter by returning to the concept of machinic enslavement and proposing a theoretical reflection on the possibilities that more structured interventions in the temporal dimension would open.



#### 4.6. Embodying (Non)Human Rhythms: a Molecular Challenge to Neoliberal Apparatuses

As explained in previous chapters, the networks of machinic enslavement that exploit (non)human agencies appropriate their life in terms of material bodies, affects and essentially time. In the context of an “increasing automation in production processes” (Williams and Srnicek), these networks consist of “electronic and nervous connections so that users themselves are cast as quasi automatic relays of a ceaseless information flow” (Terranova, “Red Stack” 381). According to Tiziana Terranova’s interpretation of Marx’s “Fragment on Machines,” the speed at which these flows of information run, and the technological development that supports them, is functional to the capitalist logic of production, which aims at generating the maximum profit in the least amount of time (“Red Stack” 383-5). This logic subsumes the “surplus of time and energy” new technologies release in the production process and reabsorbs it “in the cycle of production of exchange value,” which continuously designs new techniques and practices to control the released time and energy (“Red Stack” 385). As digital economy boosts this dynamic (Terranova, *Network* 89), neoliberal ideology disguises it as the final liberation of “ever-accelerating technological and social innovations” (Williams and Srnicek), while marketing industries commodify audiences (Arvidsson 281) and users’ time is coopted by processes of production and distribution of commodities (Bird 507; Meehan 77; Terranova, *Network* 94). As Wu Ming put it in their writings, neoliberal capitalism appropriates users’ time “di nascosto (perché tale furto è presentato come natura delle cose)” (Wu Ming, “Feticismo”).

However, despite users’ internalization of “the totalizing tendencies of capitalism and of the market logic” (Martineau 162), Terranova argues that alternative political assemblages, free from the capitalist logic of accumulation and exploitation, can break with the enslavement of machinic networks and appropriate the released time and energy. This possibility is conditional

upon a shift of perspective aimed at establishing an alternative relation to the (non)human other, technology included. The perspective should be able “to express not just ‘use value’ as Marx put it,” or exchange value as capitalism would have it, “but also aesthetic, existential, social, and ethical values” (Terranova, “Red Stack” 384). Reading Terranova through Lazzarato and Barad, opening the self to the material-discursive entanglements with the (non)human other constitutes an exploration of alternative existential dimensions, temporal crystallizations and political possibilities.

Throughout this study, Wu Ming’s tendency to explore alternative temporalities emerged from multiple strands of their activism and Terranova’s thought finally allows us to understand the political potential of these explorations. The members of the collective dealt with “la temporalità nella quale [sono] immersi...cercando di sabotarla” (Wu Ming, “Intervista”). Such a sabotage led the fight against neoliberal subjugating practices by fostering alternative and emancipatory rhythms, durations, and temporal experiences. The previous sections of this chapter anticipated Wu Ming’s approach to time through the analysis of the seventy-two-hour break on responding to posts on *Giap*. The break programmatically seeks to interrupt the fast-paced rhythms of online reading and block impulsive over-reactions. The break asks the reader to slow down, take time to navigate the text, critically reflect upon it, and join the conversation after. Moreover, as the average length of Wu Ming’s blog posts demonstrates, online reading is for them an experience that must take time and make the reader dwell in the text. The publication of the book *Giap! Tre anni di narrazioni e movimenti* (2003), which collects a selection of *Giap* early issues, and the e-book *Giap: l’archivio e la strada* (2013), where some blog posts posted on *Giap* between 2010 and 2012 are published, confirms Wu Ming’s commitment to meet the challenge that, according to Derrick De Kerckhove, contemporary culture faces. This challenge

is slowing down online fluxes of information and creating alternative rhythms of content fruition informed by the technological affordances of different material supports (122).

Furthermore, looking at contemporary forms of enslavement from a temporal perspective is a strategic move allowing us to see how the exploration of alternative temporalities does not concern only online practices of participation, but also offline experiences. As Terranova writes, “most industrial labor today is still heavily manual, automated only in the sense of being hooked up to the speed of electronic networks of prototyping, marketing and distribution... The state of things in most industries today is intensified exploitation” (“Red Stack” 386). The acritical reliance on online practices of participation, and the Internet as a space for free expression and information sharing, disregards the connection between online and offline forms of exploitation engendered by the so-called “Internet of things” (Bunz and Meikle). As this definition of the Internet reads, the capillary proliferation of online networks depends upon the multiplication of devices and hardware components allowing users to connect. According to Fred Turner, the existence and functioning of these technologies depends on “manual laborers” that remain “invisible to those who promote the Internet and the network mode of production as evidence of a new stage in human evolution” (261). The cooperative construction of alternative temporal practices “per rallentare i ritmi, interrompere lo sfruttamento, riconquistare pezzi di vita” (Wu Ming, “Feticismo”) will therefore potentially join online and offline enslaved machinic networks and fight most contemporary techniques of exploitation operating in both dimensions.

The transfer of online content from the newsletter and blog to the offline formats of the book *Giap!* and the e-book *L'archivio e la strada*, together with the organization of the #Renziscappa campaign, are examples of Wu Ming's determination to join online and offline dimensions in the construction of alternative practices and reflect on temporal forms of

participation in the latter dimension as well. The analysis of Wu Ming's engagement in the shooting of *Lavorare con lentezza*, as well as the excursions organized for *Resistenze in Cirenaica*, discussed in Chapter 1, demonstrated their interest in exploring past temporal layers through an encounter with the *offline* materiality of other bodies, urban spaces and experiences of that past. Moreover, Chapter 3 introduced how Wu Ming articulated their interventions in the temporal dimension through literary texts. The attention of the collective for the evolution of the No TAV movement was motivated by the capacity of the latter to undermine the rhythm of the construction site, interrupt it and cause delays. In *Il sentiero degli dei* and *Il sentiero luminoso*, the practice of walking breaks with the acceleration imposed on the human encounter with the environment and performatively embodies the enactment of an alternative relationality. These two books' insistence on not identifying the experience of the narrator with that of the reader also pointed at the need to consider the singularity of one's encounter with the environment and its rhythms. My path and the rhythm of my steps are different from your path and your pace. We may strive to find a common pace—indeed, this is a paramount step toward the common development of a political praxis grounded in alternative temporal approaches. Yet, the final entanglement of these rhythms will necessarily result from an articulation of singular steps whose singularity must be preserved and valued.

After the misstep of the Manifesto analysed in Chapter 2, Wu Ming's political forms of intervention did not aim to forge a coherent collective subjectivity, if by coherent one means a homogenous political body whose plural components are institutionalized and adhere to a fixed ideological standpoint. The temporal focus of Wu Ming's interventions worked toward the cooperative creation of common practices. Or, perhaps, they aimed at a common approach to life (maybe a shared life rhythm?). These practices—from their collaborative writing to the

discussions on *Giap*, offline performances, excursions and writing labs—sought to create “nuove temporalità comuni” (Negri, *Kairos* 67-8) able to accommodate singular interpretations of these temporalities, as well as individual acts of self-positioning and the unpredictable entanglements these acts produce. As we accept to write, create, walk together or engage in a discussion, the rhythm at which our entanglement is enacted depends on my agency, your agency and our responses to the (non)human agencies that partake in these collective endeavours. The seventy-two-hour break, the eye of the camera in the story-map, the hashtag #Renziscappa, as well as a steep path in the Apennine range, are all nonhuman agencies to which we respond in our encounter with (non)human others. Thus, they co-determine our (i.e., human and nonhuman) temporalities.

Through the transmedia strands of their activism, Wu Ming seemed and seem to encourage their online and offline followers to endow their bodies with “relations of speed and slowness” that are not exclusively human and will make them explore alternative relations to (non)human others (Deleuze and Guattari 258). Engaging in material practices that explore post-anthropocentric life rhythms, we ultimately make these rhythms affect the molecular dimension of our subjectivities. We embody temporalities that produce new affects, desires, acts of self-positioning that in turn crystallize into actions and discourses. This production does not simply counter the operation of neoliberal apparatuses at the discursive level, but constitutes an alternative process rooted in the pre-discursive existence and being of the interrelated (non)human entities of the world. This process is ongoing, constant, unfolding in its singular and continuous manifestations. The articulation of alternative rhythms in terms of embodied practices affects the molecular dimension of those that enact them, programmatically undermining neoliberal apparatuses through a capillary collection of small but constant changes.

The theoretical reflection in this section sheds new light on Wu Ming's activism and illuminates a promising research path that here I could only sketch and briefly pursue. This reflection was necessary, however. It enables me to finally clarify the conception of political change that grounds Wu Ming's interventions and particularly the #Renziscappa campaign. The whole campaign was a sequence of protests and interventions that slowly but surely contributed to causing Renzi's government political demise. The participants in the campaign were not part of an ideologically tied political party. Each performed a singular yet significant part by using the hashtag, posting a comment on *Giap*, holding a banner in the streets, making a video or sharing the story-map. The success of the campaign, in other words, was fostered by a plural (non)human assemblage that patiently instilled a crack in Renzi's narrative and forged an alternative. As *giapster* [girolamo] writes in his comment to one of the blog post about the #Renziscappa campaign, "l'importante è continuare ad accumulare piccoli granelli di materia per produrre le condizioni di una possibile catastrofe, ciascuno con i mezzi che ha e che può mettere in gioco."

In the twenty years of their activism, Wu Ming aimed and still aim to bring about political change by producing contained yet constant transformations in the current system of power relations. Wu Ming's interventions articulate political change as, recalling Terranova's words, "a distributed movement able to displace the limits and terms within which the political constitution of the future is played out" (156). The goal of Wu Ming's distributed forms of engagement is to convert machinic networks (i.e., the blog, the story-map) into forms of subjectivation that slowly but surely reconfigure the subject positions informed by the discursive apparatuses of social subjection. Wu Ming's activism produces relational subjectivities that constantly evolve and essentially consist of their becoming entanglements with (non)human

points of view, bodies, temporalities and affects. These subjectivities position themselves in the current system of power relations, being accountable for the long-term political transformations they embody and enact through the creation of ethically informed entanglements. These transformations do not consist of electoral successes under the regime of representative democracy. They ontologically emerge from the performative enactments of alternative relationalities, subjectivities and assemblages.

## Conclusion

Montreal, 2020. Weathered yet thrilled by my journey across the trajectories of Wu Ming's activism, I am about to write my conclusions and look at the map I drew one last time before folding it. This cartography challenged the naturalization of neoliberal ideology and the rhetoric of urgency that sees it as the unique model for the conception of political relations, agency and subjectivity. Analysing Wu Ming's interventions demonstrated that the production of alternative subjectivities is possible, thinkable, imaginable and achievable within the current system of power relations. Wu Ming opened this space of possibilities through a cultural project grounded in a post-anthropocentric ethics and from this ground elaborated entangled sets of material, linguistic and discursive interventions. My preliminary incursion in Wu Ming's activism (Chapter 1) demonstrated that, although these interventions can provisionally be disentangled for the sake of their intelligibility, ultimately the analysis of their experimental elaboration, evolution and implications requires a transdisciplinary approach to their genealogical entanglements. As I showed in Chapter 2, the basic challenge these entanglements face as they attempt to enact an alternative is to reach beyond the mere negation or subversion of neoliberal discourses. Each entanglement must rather be grounded in forms of ethical exploration of alternative existential dimensions. These explorations would make us understand the machinic configuration of our subjectivity and contemporary modalities of enslavement.

Wu Ming's exploration of these dimensions took the literary paths I analysed in Chapter 3. Literature is for Wu Ming an imaginary but also necessarily cognitive research experience. Our imagination is critical in helping us understand how neoliberal apparatuses enslave us and making possible thought experiments that explore alternative machinic assemblages and how



they can be engendered. Imagining these assemblages in our encounter with the literary text is however only a step along the path that leads us to embody these affective forms of engagement and walk out of the boundaries of the text. *Il sentiero degli dei* and *Il sentiero luminoso* are the most emblematic examples of what literature is for Wu Ming. In their view, literature constitutes an experience not enclosed within the pages of a book or the form of a text, but an ethical, affective and political form of engagement one must ultimately embody and share in collective material and discursive practices. Literature is therefore a key component of the Wu Ming project to the extent it helps them lay the groundwork on which alternative political subjectivities can be built by leveraging online and offline transmedia networks. The analysis of Wu Ming's activism across these networks in Chapter 4 showed how the collective implemented the post-anthropocentric dialogues imagined in their literary works in the relationship with their followers. The collaborative construction of a post-anthropocentric dialogic sphere is for Wu Ming a primarily political act that does not simply focus on forms of linguistic participation. Instead, it entails embodied, affective and discursive practices. These practices challenge established norms, foster communication and sharing and bring about alternative life rhythms.

The importance of time and the temporal dimension for understanding Wu Ming's project cannot be overemphasized. Without repeating what I have just argued in the previous chapter, I want to briefly go back to the corollaries about the apparatuses of social subjection and machinic enslavement I spelled out in the introduction to this study. The acceleration of life rhythms and the appropriation of time is what join the discursive and machinic dimensions of neoliberal practices of biopolitical control. Life is bound to time and through time reconfigures material and discursive processes. Life *is* these processes and has within itself the potential for change, potential that neoliberal apparatuses incessantly strive to control and exploit. This is why I see in

Wu Ming's call for slowing down and engaging in different life rhythms the most compelling and effective attempt for undermining neoliberal ideology. Of course, their programmatic commitment to collective writing practices targets hyper-individualism, as the elaboration of post-anthropocentric approaches to the world criticizes humanist and anthropocentric models of neoliberal subjectivity. These forms of criticism, however, are all tied to our time-bound existence on this planet and therefore to how we live our time on it. Wu Ming's engagement in collective practices and post-anthropocentric approaches is ultimately a call for exploring life rhythms that are not necessarily only our own and therefore anthropocentric. Creating collectively and encountering the nonhuman environment essentially means dealing with temporalities that do not belong to us and are radically different from those imposed by neoliberal ideology.

As I write these words about time and imagine myself folding the map I constructed, I cannot help thinking about the need to slow down for a second and reflect. Should I in fact embrace that gesture? Or, rather, should I resist the desire for closure? After all, a map is folded to be put away, and isn't my hope precisely the opposite? Don't I wish my cartography to be kept open, shared and serve? The answer to these questions lies in what I learned from investigating Wu Ming's interventions: mapping, understanding and intervening in the current system of power relations implies maintaining a dynamic position in these relations and responding to them with mutating and diverse forms of activism, from both a synchronic and diachronic perspective. Synchronically speaking, Wu Ming's dynamic approach is evident in their ramified transmedia presence, online and offline. Maintaining such a presence implies being able to intervene in multiple networks and therefore make the plural assemblage of ideas, affects, feelings, substances we embody play an agential role in innumerable (non)human

entanglements at the same time. From a diachronic perspective, Wu Ming's mutating approach emerges from the series of experiments, resets, reflections and changes of strategy that populate their first twenty years of activism. Their strategy is indeed experimental insofar as it embeds within itself a need for self-questioning and a readiness to re-position ourselves, mutate and transform according to the responses and affects it engenders.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, any cartography about Wu Ming, or indeed any cartography whatsoever, should never be folded. Cartographies rather unfold and variously crystallize as one enters different systems of power relations and respond to them. These maps create boundaries in order to make these relations intelligible and open further trajectories of investigation. I will therefore "end" my cartography not with a closing gesture but rather by pointing at two of the more promising trajectories that it opens for future study.

The first trajectory concerns the literary domain. I see in Wu Ming's conception of literature a suggestion to rethink the role of the literary critic and the academic boundaries of disciplines like Literary Studies. If the literary text is a form of intervention that imagines, produces and performatively seeks to enact an alternative ethics, relationality and political praxis, then literary debates become opportunities to take a position in this process and further or hinder the construction of the alternative the text envisions. The work of the literary critic, in

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<sup>57</sup> Wu Ming's process of self-questioning involves all their interventions, even the ones that were most successful. At the end of 2019, the collective decided to abandon Twitter and transform their account in a bot that reproduces content produced on different platforms. As they explain of their blog ("L'amore"), Twitter has been recently implementing policies that restrict the users' possibility to customize their activity and access the information about the platform. At the same time, Twitter allowed users to embed more and more content in their tweets, so as to make Twitter users spend more time on the platform rather than engaging in forums and debates outside of it. The goal was to centralize and unify, rather than pluralize and disseminate, so as to increase revenues from advertising companies. These policies also contributed to transform the experience of being on Twitter into a competition for those who get more followers, more likes, more retweets, and therefore introduced relational dynamics that reinstate neoliberal models of interaction. For these reasons, Wu Ming decided to move their activity out of the platform and join the community of Mastodon and other open source, non-commercial, independent platforms that allow them to share content without advertisement and customize their experience of communication. This move is not going to be the last in the activity of the collective, but demonstrates how their project is an ongoing and never-ending metamorphosis that responds to how it impacts on the current system of power relations.

other words, becomes itself a form of intervention that contributes to elaborate the imaginary and cognitive components of the reading experience and explore the entanglement of literary forms of expression with material and discursive practices. Such a contribution by the literary critic entails opening the field of Literary Studies to other disciplines that would help her make sense of how literature can possibly intervene in this world and bring about change. This is a new type of “engagement” that transcends the old categories of “critica accademica” and “critica militante” by combining a sustained and interdisciplinary theoretical reflection and careful textual analysis, with a keen sensitivity to the ethical and political stakes that the text and its context raise. I believe that, in the current academic landscape, the most interesting contributions to this open conception of literature and the studies related to it come from the emerging fields of Ecocriticism and the Environmental Humanities. The transdisciplinary combination of knowledge coming from the Humanities and disciplines like Biology and Ecology is a compelling example of how literary discourse is a point of entry for debates about post-anthropocentric ethics and the development of sustainable relations with our environment.<sup>58</sup>

The second trajectory that stems from my cartography runs across political territories and points at the complex relationship between relational conceptions of the subject and contemporary forms of political engagement, such as the struggles defending civil rights. Wu Ming’s activism is grounded in the conviction that the coordination of a plurality of human and

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<sup>58</sup> It is interesting to note the original approaches of the presentations included in the panel *Ecocritical Fieldwork*, organized at the recent 2020 MLA Convention in Seattle. The general assumption behind the panel was that, in order to make sense of the ethics and politics of a literary text from an ecocritical perspective, critics should get out in the field and combine their encounter with the text with an embodied exploration of the material dimension its language crystallizes. For the presenters in the panel, and for ecocritics more in general, this combined encounter is functional to make sense of the environmental narratives embedded in the literary text. These narratives crystallize the entanglement between human and nonhuman entities in linguistic forms of expression, but they fundamentally point at the material crystallizations of these entanglements, which the ecocritic is asked to embody and physically discover. In particular, I am referring here to the conference papers “Notes from the Ark” by Julian D. Yates and “Listening in the Field and to the Text: The Role of Sound Recording in Ecocritical Approaches to Thoreau’s *Walden*” by Christina Katopodis.

nonhuman agencies can produce social and political change, yet the relational conception of subjectivity which their activism embodies clashes with the theoretical assumptions of civil rights movements. In her keynote speech at the last MLA Convention titled “Impasse and Futurity: The Category of the Human” (Seattle 2020), Judith Butler expressed her concern about current fights for human civil rights being based upon a humanist and anthropocentric definition of the subject. If the subject is a relational, plural and processual entity whose agency is distributed across (non)human assemblages, to whom do these rights really belong? For whom are these needed and essential battles being fought? Are they really pointing at a direction fostering change in the long term if at their core one still finds anthropocentric conceptions of the human? I want to make it clear that, like Butler, I share and strongly support the political passion and energy of the activist who fight these battles. Yet, the risk in not abandoning anthropocentric models is to fight on a discursive ground whose boundaries have been delimited by the adversary and miss the opportunity to convert molecular forms of enslavement into networks of (non)human collaboration. Interesting contributions in this regard are coming from the field of the Legal Post-Humanities, where scholars are striving to redefine the notions of a legal subject and a legal right from a post-anthropocentric perspective.

I think that following these two trajectories will be fundamental for elaborating future forms of cultural and political intervention that would be able to put post-humanist and post-anthropocentric thought and its theoretical articulations into practice. Wu Ming’s project has so far been a compelling attempt to carry out this task, an attempt made of experiments, mistakes, reboots, failures and successes. Following the trajectories of their activism was for me an opportunity to contribute a critical analysis and understanding of their project and, rather than proposing a pre-established and fully determined alternative to neoliberal ideology, support the

idea that an alternative is indeed possible, thus resolutely contradicting Adorno's darkest aphorism: "The horror is that for the first time we live in a world in which we can no longer imagine a better one" (Adorno and Horkheimer 61). We need not surrender to that horror. The better world, the alternative, does not reside in a transcendental spirit or a totalizing revolutionary catharsis, but is a virtual possibility immanent to the ethics and politics that our actions, even humble ones, enact day by day. To us, now, the endeavour of picking up this cartography once again and continue the journey.

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